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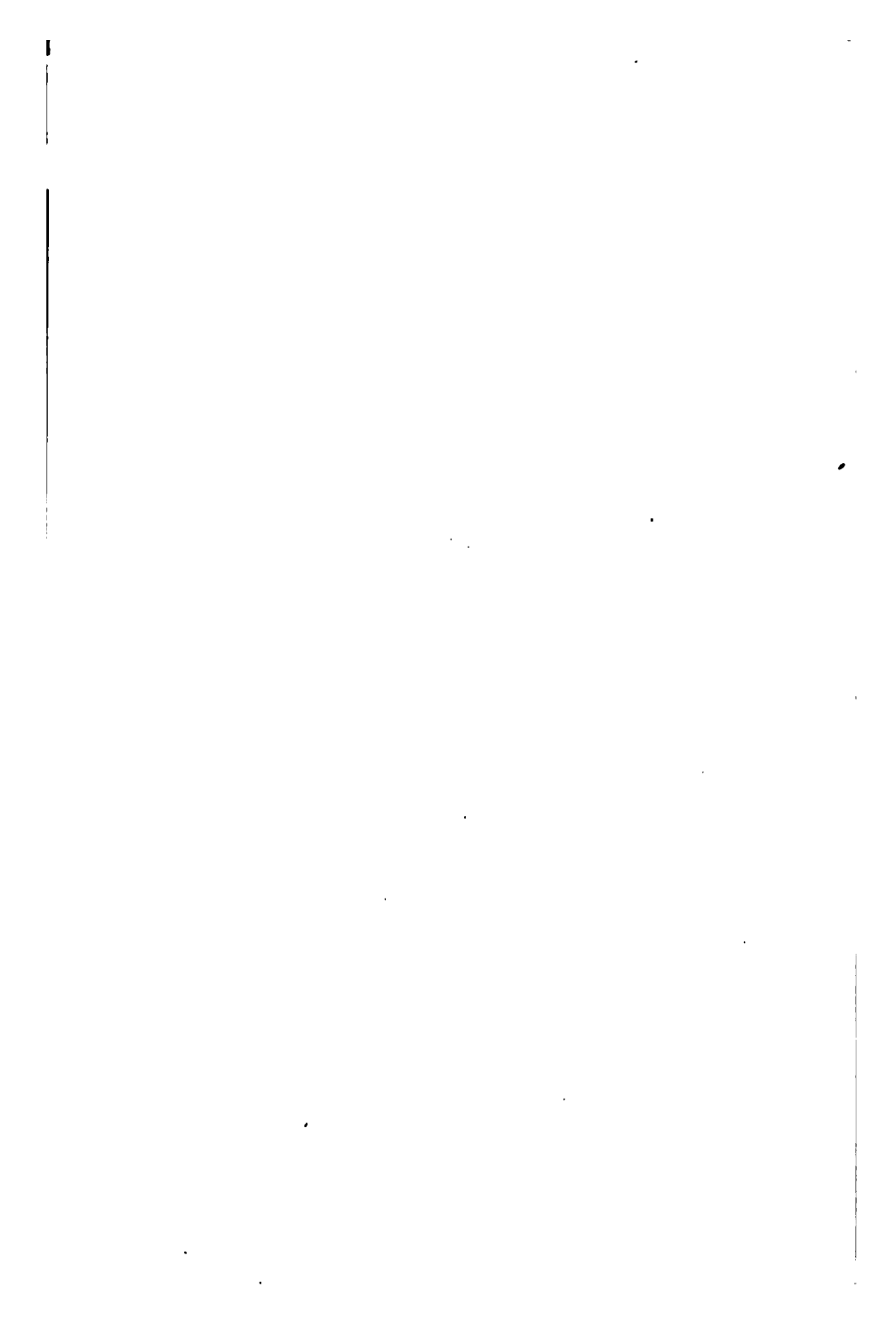
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P O O R Z E P H

A N D

O T H E R T A L E S .

V O L . I I .



POOR ZEPH

AND

OTHER TALES

BY

F. W. ROBINSON

AUTHOR OF

"GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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ROMANCE OF A BACK STREET

VOL. II.

B

ROMANCE OF A BACK STREET.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN DAX.

THE fancy repository in Gibbon Street, Lambeth, was no ephemeral affair—none of your fly-away businesses, subject to strange accidents, defalcant tenants, and missing keys, at those embarrassing quarters of the year when the landlord wants his rent. Meagre and poor to look at, “Mori-son’s Repository” had evidently been a good one to go, if the board between the first-floor windows could be relied on for veracity, the business having been established in

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the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight. No one doubted the fact in Gibbon Street; the oldest inhabitant had no recollection of any name save Morison over the little square windows of the shop, where business was far from brisk, despite the date of its first start, and the claims of old associations which it asserted over all new-comers to the neighbourhood.

There were three Morisons left to manage the shop at the date our story opens—two pale-faced young women, who would have been pretty in another sphere, with a fancy repository off their minds, and a struggle to keep afloat in the world less perceptibly manifest, and a third woman, paler and more wan, who was the mother of the other two.

These three took care of the shop and of Mr. Morison, a clerk in the Customs with a scanty salary that helped towards paying the rent, and kept him every evening in

fours of whisky and water, hot, at the "George" over the way. It scarcely seemed possible that Morison's Repository could be doing very well down that shadowy back street, where grim facts were more patent to the locality than fancy goods. There was little in the window to attract the attention of passers-by making their short-cuts to Waterloo Road and Kennington, and the regular customers were always few and far between. The stock did not change much from year's end to year's end. There were wooden and leather dolls that seemed as old and time-stained as the bricks of the establishment; there was a superior wax doll under a cracked glass shade, which had been once the glory of the firm, but which had let in the flies of late days, and spotted irretrievably the image of youthful beauty still simpering beneath it. In their proper seasons there were a few new halfpenny balls, shuttlecocks, marbles, and kites, but they went off slowly, and there was always



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Dax opened his eyes and stared at the faces looking down upon him.

"Where's this—wot's this?" asked John.

"This is Morison's Repository, Gibbon Street, young man," said Mr. Morison.

"Oh! is it?"

"And I hope you haven't been drinking to account for this state?"

"No," answered John, faintly, "nor eatin' either—wus luck!"

"Starving!" cried Ellen Morison; "oh! see, he looks like it, poor fellow."

"When did you have anything to eat last?" asked Mary, who was young and curious.

"Or drink last?" added Mr. Morison, also sympathetic, and knowing what an utter misery absence from drink was to him at any period of his existence.

"Can't remember; yesterday, I think."

"Not to-day—at all?" asked Ellen, anxiously.

"Not to-day—blest if I have."

"See to him, let us do something," said Mary Morison, and then there was much bustle in Gibbon Street, and some bread and cheese and ale found by these poor people for John Dax.

When John Dax was getting rapidly better he condescended to impart some general information as to his mode of living, or rather his method of attempting to live under the difficulties which oppressed him, and it was not altogether a pleasant confession. Still, they wished to know, and he was grateful and communicative. After all, it was a common-place history enough. He had been for some weeks out of work, and times were generally bad. His father was a vocalist, that is, a gentleman whose especial mission it was to howl nautical ballads in the streets, and to depend upon the patronage of those who stopped to hear him.

It had been hard work that winter with John's father too, whose voice gave way

about the same period as his legs, which were taken suddenly with paralyeis, and spoiled business, and so John Dax from that time forth had done his best to work for his father and himself, not always with success, and not at any time to the satisfaction of his parent, who was an exacting man, a mercenary man, and hard to please. When John Dax came home with less than one and sixpence, John Dax's father swore profanely; and when John brought no money home at all—which was occasionally the case—the father would fling his crutches at him, and bid him keep away until he was of service to him, and money could be had in some fashion, as we have already intimated.

This night was the beginning of the real life of John Dax, and brought about more than any of them dreamed. John had become an object of interest to the Morisons, and he was touched by the first kindness which he had encountered in his gutter-bred

existence. He went away muttering many thanks; he returned the next morning to volunteer his services in any fashion, "free and gratis," to show that he was not unmindful of the past charity that had been extended to him. He departed somewhat crestfallen at no work being found for him on those terms; if he could have taken a parcel home, or run on an errand, he would have been happier in his mind. He turned up once more in the evening, and was fortunately of service on that occasion. Mr. Morison was late; there was a debate on Political Economy at the "George," and the proprietor of the repository had a great deal to say upon the question, and was not at home to put the shutters up.

The next night Mr. Morison was at home, and put one of the shutters through the window, being generally shaky about the hands, and John Dax proved to be of use again, as an amateur glazier who could save expense for the Morisons by buying putty

and glass for them and doing the job right off, but with a lavish consumption of putty, some of which he left on the dolls and shuttlecocks. He would take nothing for himself on this occasion; he slunk away at once when they offered him a few pence, and muttered,

“No, thankee—for nuffink, please, if you’ll let me, jest this time!”

He was of use once again that week in helping Mr. Morison home. The second debate on Political Economy, combined with two extra “fours” of whisky, had overpowered the toy-man, and John guided his steps reverently to the emporium, and landed him in the front shop in safety and with dignity. After this, John was an irregular attendant and servitor, and came in handy now and then, till the decease of Mr. Morison, who went off suddenly, to the intense grief of a family that thought a great deal more of him than anybody else had done. It was a great grief and a great

loss, for Mr. Morison's salary went off with him, and the three women were left to struggle against the world together. Such struggling as it always is too in streets like this of Gibbon.

There came a change in the affairs of the Morisons—an alteration of the tactics by which this hard world was to be confronted. Toys would not keep the wolf from the door. Toys were never in great demand in that neighbourhood; the children made dolls for themselves out of their own rags, fancy chains from the cherry stones that were picked out of the gutter, and little go-carts from the crab shells unearthed in the dust-contractors' yards. Real toys were for the happy and prosperous youth of other places.

There appeared suddenly at the back of the shop window a written announcement in Italian hand, framed and glazed, that told the old story of hard work and small pay. "Dress-making done here," was formally

announced three months after old Morison had died, leaving a second wife and two daughters to the mercies of Gibbon Street; and then this dress-making killed the widow off-hand, and made of the daughters two sunken-eyed, hollow-cheeked, sad-looking young women, whom the neighbours respected and pitied, and helped with orders when they were able. Time was when the Morison girls had been considered "stuck up," and inclined to stand aloof from the people next door and over the way; but this was in the old times, when Morison was under Government. Gibbon Street fancied that Morison was well off in the world, and said, till his death, that he had made a pretty penny by the business; but, after his wife and daughters had half ruined themselves with the expenses of his funeral, it began to be whispered abroad that they were "down on their luck," even for the residents of Gibbon Street. Still they never gave way, never acknowledged that they were poor or

hard pressed, even when the mother died ; and three years afterwards they were still the Misses Morison, of the repository, with a smile and nod—the former forced at times—to those who gave each in her turn good-day at the front-door or in the murky recesses of the shop.

They were young women, seldom, if ever, seen together—work would not allow it, or the shop stopped the way to the society of each other ; for, if there were no pressure of business, there were many questions as to the price of goods, from penniless children of an inquiring turn of mind and with much time upon their hands. One week Mary Morison, the younger sister, worked at dress-making behind the counter, and Ellen, the elder by two years, was to be seen, over the wire blind of the parlour-door, stitching quickly and steadily, and thinking of old times, perhaps ; and next week the position would be reversed, and Mary would be indoors, and Ellen waiting for the customers.

They went to church twice every Sunday, and were good young women who did not run after the chaps on Sabbath evenings, as was the fashion among the girls of Gibbon Street, take them in the aggregate. It was remarked presently by curious folk that they did not go to church together, but that each went her own way and to her own particular place of worship, as though their religions differed, or a week's work in the same house had rendered them weary of each other's company. And Sundays or week-days, they always looked gravely at the world before them, and took life as a serious undertaking, which it was to them. They kept no company, and they never called upon their neighbours save in the way of "measuring," and "fitting," and taking home their work; want of time was their excuse, when an excuse was necessary, to those who would have liked to call them friends.

Mary and Ellen Morison had no friends,

unless we except John Dax, who was always their "humble and obedient servant to command," and who came every morning at seven and every evening at ten to take down and put up the shutters before the windows of the establishment, on which he considered himself now permanently engaged. So time went on, and John Dax grew up to manhood, and there were five years and some odd months lying between the present time and the far-away epoch when he was discovered on the doorstep.

John Dax had not been a strong youth, and hard work and indifferent living had told against him, till the night of his collapse, as they were telling against him even more forcibly now. He was the mere shadow of a young man, a patient and uncomplaining being, whom the wise folk down his court where his father lived considered "half a fool," he was so awfully quiet, and took his troubles with such

strange philosophy. The life of the boy was the life of the man, with very little difference, contrary winds having been dead against John Dax from the unfortunate day of his birth—factory life, street-barrow life, shoe-black life, life from hand to mouth, which means the mouth wide open and nothing for the hand to put into it.

Patience and perseverance in this weak, old-fashioned young man ought to have accomplished something for John Dax, if there be any truth in aphorisms; but there were certain obstacles in his way, and he was only surmounting them by degrees. Five years ago he had been unable to read and write, and Mary Morison had told him she was ashamed of him for that, and he began in odd moments afterwards, and under terrible difficulties, his father's grave objection being one of them. He had succeeded partly in his efforts—that is, he could write his own name, and spell a few facts out of the columns of a newspaper.

Mary Morison, unwittingly, was another obstacle to his advancement, for we may say at once that John Dax was over head and ears in love with her, and would have declined any situation under the sun that would have prevented his opening and shutting the repository, and catching a glimpse of Mary's face, and of being warmed to the heart's core by Mary's sad but pleasant smile. Mary was a princess to this ill-clad, ill-fed young man—a divinity in rusty black—and as far above his dreams or his ambitions as the other goddesses. She was a fair obstacle in the way of his advancement, but she never guessed it, and, as for imagining that he loved her, she would as soon have dreamed of love from the fly-blown doll under the glass case in the window. He was no hero to her—only a poor sickly mortal, who put the shutters up for ninepence a week, and went cowering home afterwards in the shadows of the

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narrow streets beyond, where crime was rife and penury was plentiful.

Still John Dax had his romance, and that is why the history of it, and all that came of it, may be worth the telling in these pages.

CHAPTER II.

MR. DAX'S DECEASE.

WHEN it was Ellen Morison's turn to keep watch and ward behind the counter of the little shop in Gibbon Street, John Dax saw but little of the younger sister. Ellen was equally kind in her quiet way, equally gentle and sympathetic in her patronage, but the kindness and the patronage were not Mary's.

One evening in Ellen's week, John Dax became suddenly more absent and confused than ordinary, and Ellen, an observant young woman, even when work was press-

ing, detected a change in his demeanour before he had put up the third shutter of the shop, and nearly succeeded in driving the corner of it through the upper glass window.

When he came in for shutter No. 4, she said, without looking up from her work,

"Is anything the matter, John?"

"Yes—there is—a little the matter," he said, in a hesitating manner.

"Are you ill?" asked Ellen Morison.

"No, I ain't ill," answered John Dax, "but the old un is."

"Your father?"

"Yes; he's going off the hooks at last."

John was not refined in his discourse—even in his grief the poor fellow was slangy; and there was real grief at the bottom of his heart for the man who had brought him up badly, and been never grateful for a son's attention.

Ellen Morison said a few words of comfort to him, quoted one or two texts ap-

plicable to his condition, and stitched on in her usual swift and silent manner. John listened, nodded gravely, and went away, returned a moment afterwards, and leaned across the counter to say, in a husky voice,

"Tell her."

"Tell whom?" asked Ellen Morison, surprised.

"Miss Mary: she was asking after the gov'nor last week."

Ellen moved her head slightly, as if in acquiescence.

"*She* is well, I suppose?" asked John, glancing askance at the wire blind.

"She is quite well, thank you," answered the elder sister.

"She was looking very pale last week, I fancied," said John.

Miss Morison did not reply to this, and John, after waiting a minute, as if for his answer, took himself off the premises.

He went straight to the squalid home where Mr. John Dax, senior, was getting

“off the hooks” as rapidly as possible, and in a manner as uncomfortable to himself and to those concerned in his decease as it was possible for him to select. Mr. Dax, senior, could not lie composedly in his bed, but insisted upon sitting in a half-upright condition in the very centre of it, with a lean claw clutching at each side of the sheets, with his crutch across his knees, and two small red eyes blinking furtively at his son. He had not loved his son John in a bad lifetime; in his dying moments he was equally consistent, and he swore at him hard and fast when the death-rattle in his throat ceased sufficiently to allow of a clear expression of opinion.

He told John as well as his failing breath would permit that he was *not* going to die; that he had no intention of making himself such an infernal fool as that to please anybody; that the parish doctor was a howling idiot, and didn't know his business; and that John had been the worst fool and idiot

of the whole kit of 'em in Glander's Court to fetch a doctor to see what was the matter with him, when there wasn't any blarmed blooming thing the matter, as anyone could see. He could sit up; he was as strong and jolly as ever, and meant to sit up too; and if they tried to make him lie down and go to sleep—when he didn't want to go to sleep—s'elp everythink he knew, he'd brain them with his crutch.

John Dax remained his meek and uncomplaining son to the last; his father's objurgations did not affect him; his wish to be of service to the dying man was only the more strikingly apparent as the hours drew on apace, carrying this harsh life along with them to the outer gates.

The lodgers in the same house, in the same court, crept in one by one to look at the old man, almost choking up the little dirty room at times, so curious were they about him, and so interested in the future of poor John. They were of all shades of

poverty, of honesty and dishonesty, but they were all interested in the decease of Mr. Dax, and were, a few of them, so disregarding of Mr. Dax's feelings as to congratulate the son aloud on getting rid of the old brute. Meanwhile the old brute raved and shrieked and blasphemed, and told them again that he was not going to die, and cursed them for coming in to contradict him. When he got very weak, and all the pillows and bundles in the room were at the back of him to sustain him in the position which he had assumed, he called John to him and asked how much money he had earned that day.

John told him that he had earned nothing, upon which his father began to whimper, seeing, as he said, nothing but the workhouse ahead of him, with such a beastly, lazy son upon his hands. Presently he wandered in his mind, and talked about his mattress being uncomfortable for him, and then of bequeathing his mattress to some

hospital, so that his son should not have the enjoyment of it after him, but lie like a dog in the streets and on the stones. After which he let himself completely free of "the hooks," protesting to the last that he was never better in his life, and that he should go out to-morrow, if it was fine, and sing "Poor Tom Bowling" down the Borough.

The next morning John Dax knocked at the door of the repository, and was agreeably surprised to find it was Mary Morison who admitted him. He had arrived a quarter of an hour earlier than usual, and Mary was the first downstairs.

"You are before your time, John," she said, as he began to unscrew the inner bolt of the shutters.

"Yes, I thought I'd come earlier—I couldn't rest."

"What is the matter, then?"

"The guv'nor died in the night. I said he would."

"Your father dead!" exclaimed Mary.
"I'm very sorry for you."

"Thank you," answered John; "It's kind to say so. You've been expecting it, mayhap."

"No, I've not."

"Didn't Miss Ellen tell you last night I thought it would be soon?"

"No."

"Oh! she forgot, I s'pose."

"Very likely," answered Mary; "she is busy just now."

John thought of this reply after he had taken the shutters down, and was disposed to believe that there was a lack of sympathy with his orphanage, until Mary said,

"Is there anything I can do to help you in this distress, John?"

"God bless yer, miss, nothink," he blurted forth.

"I'm afraid you cannot do much for yourself, my poor fellow!"

"I must leave it to the parish," said

John ; "they won't do it werry neat—but I ain't going in for style !"

When John Dax got home, he found that the parish officials had been extra diligent in the matter of his father's decease, and had already deposited the defunct gentleman in a long and high-shouldered watchbox, which was smeared with slate-coloured paint to give it a mourning aspect. They had numbered the box 6, and scrawled Dax in chalk on the lid, and had left notice with a downstairs lodger that the funeral would take place to-morrow, with five more ladies and gentlemen in a similar unpleasant condition, at the parish cemetery at three in the afternoon, and that Mr. John Dax had better be there to the minute if he thought it worth his while to attend.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dax, senior, was left in a corner of the room to be fetched as soon as the registration of death was effected, and two other little jobs in the same court had been finished with extraordinary punctuality

and dispatch, the weather being warm, an epidemic raging in the Lambeth slums, and one or two vestrymen living too close at hand to be comfortable.

John Dax sat down on the corner of the old brown mattress, from which they had taken his father, and tried to think it all out as well as his poor faculties would allow, mixing up the death in Glander's Court with the life that went on in Gibbon Street in a strange fashion, and feeling the loss of his father, and of his father's tyranny, in a strange fashion too. He did not shed any tears—he would have been puzzled to know what he should cry for, the absence of Mr. Dax in the flesh was even then a relief to him—but he was dull and dispirited, and the old room did not seem the same to him.

He sat and picked with his thin fingers at the rough canvas of the mattress in a meditative fashion, and with his eyes fixed on the slate-coloured box in which they

had nailed down his father ; time and place were lost to him, and the present was as misty and indistinct as his own uncertain future, until a strange and startling incident brought him back to life. He had worried the casing of the mattress into a hole with his nervous fingers ; he had plucked out fragments of a dirty greasy flock with which the mattress was stuffed, when he suddenly touched something round and smooth and cold—a small disk of metal, another and another, a heap of them lying closely packed together, a half-dozen heaps, by all that was remarkable ! John Dax held his breath and opened his mouth without the power to turn round and look at what he had discovered ; he would have made a fine study for Cruikshank at that moment, sitting there spell-bound and transfixed, with one wasted hand upon the treasure-trove.

He was sure it was money, a lot of money, which his father had secreted—the

savings of a life—the explanation of his father's anxiety about his mattress, the meaning of his wish to leave it to anyone save the son whom he had never loved. Money! found by and belonging to him, who had never known what the sole possession of five shillings was like before that day. All lawfully belonging to him, how much in farthings, or sixpences, or even shillings, to constitute such a heap as this, he wondered. He swung himself round at last, and tore open the sacking with both hands. Great God! sovereigns and half-sovereigns, and some small packets of bank-notes tied round with little bits of twine! Was it all a dream, and had he fallen asleep after a night's long watching? Was somebody playing him a trick? Had Lambeth parish been taken with a larky fit? Had there been a robbery somewhere in the neighbourhood, and was this the "swag" concealed here by some of his father's pals? Was his father a receiver of

stolen goods? Was the devil at the bottom of it all?

John Dax could have fainted away over the discovery in his weakness and surprise, but voices on the stairs and feet shuffling about there recalled him to consciousness, and to a keen sense of the necessity for haste, even for secrecy. There were people in the house with whom he and his newly-acquired property would be far from safe if this were known; the parish might wish to make a fuss about it; the Queen, for what he knew, might call to claim it—he had heard stories of the kind; and to prove even his own kinship to the miser would have been quite beyond his powers. The less said about this the better; and then the two gals in Gibbon Street, perhaps some day the better for it too—at all events, one of 'em, God bless her! His thoughts went away to Gibbon Street as he gathered his wealth together. He did not consider how he might be benefited himself by this great

change in his fortunes ; for a man who had lived so hard, and fought so hard with life, he was singularly unselfish.

He knew that he was rich—very rich in comparison with his past career—he could count two hundred pounds in gold and notes, he was sure, but he could only think of Gibbon Street just then.

CHAPTER III.

LEFT IN TRUST.

IN the evening John Dax came slowly, as usual, into the little shop in Gibbon Street, but this time accompanied by a deputy—an over-grown, bullet-headed youth of stolid aspect. John came in with his face very white and his hands shaking with excitement, and Ellen Morison, at her old post behind the counter, thought he had been drinking.

“I couldn’t stop away and leave you in the lurch,” he said, at once, “but I ain’t up to the shutter business—I ain’t well—I’ve been flurried and flustered, and somethink

has 'appened and took me off my feet, and off my head, I think. I can't tell you now."

There was an old cane-bottomed chair on his side of the counter, and he dropped into it, spread his thin hands before his face, and began to cry, keeping all the noise to himself, and only gurgling internally now and then.

"I'm better now—don't mind me," he said, at last.

"Is your father dead?" asked Ellen Morison.

"Yes; didn't Miss Mary tell you all about it?"

Ellen Morison hesitated for an instant, as if there were a difficulty in replying to this question.

"No, she did not," was the decisive answer at last.

"I told her this morning when I came to open the shop, and she seemed cut up to hear it."

"We have lost a father too, John," said Miss Morison, sadly.

"I'm glad of that—I mean I'm glad you know what my feelings is about it. Not that that's floored me all of a heap like this, but somethink else, which I'll let you know of presently—not now, I'm too flustered—wait a bit."

"I should go home and rest," Miss Morison suggested, still with the idea on her mind that grief had driven John Dax to the gin-shop.

"I will—thankee—I will. You won't mind his doing the work for a day or two, till the funeral's over?" he said, dragging forward his deputy by the fragile lappel of his jacket. "He's to be trusted, or I wouldn't have brought him, 'pon my soul!"

He went away, to return again after his old fashion. It was a habit of John Dax to come back for a last word or to hazard a final remark, and even in his excitement

he seemed bound to re-appear. On this occasion it was with a purpose, at any rate.

"I nearly forgot it," he said, as he stooped and took up a bundle from the floor. "I put it down when I came in fust, and there I might have left it altogether, only at the corner of the street I thought of it. What a lark to leave it there!" And, to the surprise of the listener, he began laughing so hysterically that it was a mercy when he came to a full stop.

He placed the bundle on the counter—it seemed very heavy and very tightly tied together—and pushed it towards Ellen Morison.

"Will you ask Miss Mary to take care of this till I come back again?" he said. "Will you—will you mind my giving it her myself?"

And then, for the first time in his life, he took the liberty of walking to the parlour door, turning the handle, and entering the

room where Mary Morison was supposed to be at work. But Mary was sitting at the table with her work unheeded on her lap, and her hands spread before her face. John thought she was asleep, till the hands dropped and showed she had been crying, and then John said, quickly,

"Oh, Miss Mary, what is it with you?—what is it?" and forgot his bundle till it fell with a crash on the floor.

"How dare you come into the room?" cried Mary, indignantly. "Who told you to enter? What do you want?"

"I—I beg parding—I am very rude; but I'm going to be away a bit, and I want you to mind this till I come back."

"What is it, John?" asked Mary, softening at his appeal, and at his wistful looks towards her.

"I want *you* to mind it, not t'other one," he said; "to keep it and what's in it, if you don't see me any more—that's all. Good-bye."

“What is it?” repeated Mary, curiously.

But John did not answer her. He backed out of the shop and ran away from Gibbon Street, and it was six months before the dress-makers saw him again.

CHAPTER IV.

A DOUBLE CONFESSION.

JOHN DAX came back to Gibbon Street in the winter-time, when the snow was falling. He had been away six months, and the Morisons might have forgotten him altogether had there not been a bundle in the bed-room cupboard to remind them of the goods he had left in trust. He came back to find nothing changed in the repository; the window stock was unaltered, the doll still simpered beneath its cracked glass shade, the gas burned as dimly and fitfully as ever; one sister sat at work behind the counter, grave as Fate, and by the fireside

in the parlour worked the other at the eternal dress-making. He had hardly expected to find the place and those who had endeared it to him in the same condition; there had been so great a change to him that he could not believe in life flowing on in as silent and monotonous a fashion as he had known it in his day. He had turned into Gibbon Street with an awful heart-sinking; he had wondered what he should do if the shop were closed, and an announcement that the premises were to let was affixed upon the shutters he had put up and taken down so often; he had prayed even that all might be as he had left it, as he stepped from the deep snow-drift into the well-known shop.

It was Ellen's week again, and he knew it. He had even calculated the weeks to make sure of it, for a reason of his own that will presently appear. He entered the premises so changed himself, for all the snow upon his shoulders, that Ellen

Morison did not know him to begin with.

"What can I serve you with, sir?" she asked, after waiting for orders in vain.

"Miss Morison, don't you know me?" he exclaimed, leaning over the counter, and looking hard into her face. She recoiled at his impulsive movement, and put her hands to the bosom of her black dress, as if afraid to look at him; then she drew a long deep breath of relief, and came close to her side of the counter, regarding him more critically.

"I don't think I know you," she said, hesitatingly.

"My name is John Dax," he said.

"John Dax," repeated Miss Morison—"not—not the man who used to come here every day—to——"

"To help with the shutters—yes."

"You have altered very much," she said, extending her hand to him, as to an old friend, "and I am glad to see it."

"Thankee," said John.

He had altered very much for the better, Ellen Morison meant, and John took it as a compliment, and was grateful for her opinion. He had tried hard to better himself from the day of his father's funeral, and he was glad that he had succeeded, that he had not striven in vain. He was still thin and pale, but he had grown a big brown beard, which became him, and rendered him more manly of appearance; he held his head erect, and looked steadily, not furtively, at his opposite neighbour; he was well-dressed, and it was difficult to associate him with the rags and squalor of six months ago.

"Nothing has changed here much," said John, looking round.

"Nothing—much," was the echo.

"Miss Mary," he said, with a great gulp, "is there?"

"Yes."

"And well?"

"Quite well."

"She sits by the fire just as she used : it's a picter—picture," he said, correcting himself, "I have often seen while I have been away."

Miss Morison looked critically at him again, and then resumed her stitching.

"I'll sit here with my back to the parlour, if you don't mind," John said, "because I should like to ask you a few questions before she knows I'm here, because I should like to tell you, her sister, straight out what's upon my mind."

Miss Morison resumed her stitching after another critical glance in his direction.

"You was both—I should say, you were both—very kind to me when I was fighting hard to live. For years I came back'ards and for'ards, always meetin' with kind words, often with kind help, when you seemed—don't mind my saying of it now, miss—hardly able, the two of you, to help yourselves. This shop was a kind of heaven

to me, and I was very wretched out of it. Then my father died."

"Yes," said Ellen Morison, softly, as he paused.

"Died rich."

The dressmaker left off work in her surprise.

"There was saved up in the mattress of his bed one hundred pounds in five-pound Bank of England notes, and about as much in suverins—sovereigns, I should say. He had been scraping and slaving all his life for this, with no one a bit the worse save hisself, and it was only by chance I found all about it, after he was dead."

"I congratulate you on your good fortune, John."

"My first idea was it had been stolen," John continued, "for the guv'nor kept bad company, and rum people came to talk to him when I was out. On the day you last saw me what do you think I did?"

"I don't know," was the simple answer.

"I took the notes to the Bank of England—making up my mind to be taken up—with 'em, if they knew the numbers, as I thought they would."

"That was an honest act, John," said Ellen, warmly.

"No, it wasn't," answered John, quickly, "for if the numbers had been known, I could have said how I had found the notes, you see, and got clear off. *She*," he added, in a whisper, "would have had the gold."

"What gold?"

"The hundred pounds in the bundle I left here—they could not have proved the money belonged to anyone in partickler, and she would have been the better for it."

"This was wrong," exclaimed Ellen Morison.

"Yes, I suppose it was; but I didn't know wrong from right very clearly, and I only wanted to help her. Nobody could have proved the gold didn't belong to her,

and I wanted to help her, you see," he said again.

"I see," repeated Ellen.

"The perlice—the police—would have bagged the lot ; it would have gone to the crown, or something, if it had been found along with the notes ; and what good would the money have done anybody then?"

"This is shallow reasoning, John," said Ellen : "the newspaper would have betrayed you, too, and told us the whole story."

"You never read the paper."

"We should have heard it from our neighbours."

"I should not have given my own name."

"Well, well," said Ellen Morison, resuming her needlework, "the notes were not stolen, and you have come back for your money."

She rose as if with the intention of fetching it, when John Dax leaned across the counter and seized her by the arm.

"No, no! God forbid!" he cried. "Sit down, please, while I tell you the rest of my mind. She's not looking up; she's brooding over the fire just as I have seen her a score of times before, and does not know that anybody's here."

"What is there more to say about her?" asked Ellen, sitting down again, thus adjured.

"Something much worse, you'll think, I daresay," he said; "but I can't help it. It's on my mind, I say again; and I want to tell you, to begin with."

"Well?" asked Ellen, as he paused.

"I've kept away six months in order to learn to read and write in earnest, and be less like the wreck of a chap I was," he said, frankly, "in order to be fit to be your friend and hers—especially hers. You've been a couple of angels to me, and I want to make a kind of a return with that money for both of you, for I shall never want it."

"Thank you, John, but we are never likely to take it," was the proud reply.

"I want you not to think of that at present," he said, "to let it wait there for me, then, till I come to fetch it. But I want to tell you outright now how I love your sister—how I have been loving her for years and years—right on, by God, without a break!"

It was a strangely excited face now that glared across at Ellen Morison; it was full of pathos and passion, and a terrible anxiety.

"Why do you tell me this?" cried Ellen Morison, in a new, harsh voice.

She was excited herself, and scarcely heeded his wild looks.

"Because you can help me, because you can tell me if she is liked by anyone else; if there will ever be a chance of her learning to like me—not now, of course not; if I may come here as a friend at first, a humble friend, teaching himself to be worthy of her

by degrees ; if she would mind my coming, not knowing that I liked her yet—not guessing at it for an instant.”

“Would you come if there was no chance for you?” asked Ellen.

“No,” he said, after a pause, “I fancy not. Then I should be glad to hook it, for good.”

“There is not a chance,” affirmed Miss Morison, severely ; “and you are a poor fool to think there is.”

“I didn’t think there was,” muttered John Dax, hanging down his head ; “I didn’t dream of it hardly—but I thought I’d ask.”

“Ask for yourself, and see what she will say,” said Ellen.

“No, no ; I can believe you,” said John, shrinking at the suggestion. “God bless her, why should I trouble *her*? But if some day you will say to her——”

“Don’t take my word for anything,” cried Ellen, as excited as himself ; “don’t

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tell me what to say; don't ask me to speak to her. *She and I have not spoken to each other for three years!*"

CHAPTER V.

CAST DOWN.

JOHN DAX was completely prostrated by Ellen Morison's avowal. His strength for a while suddenly deserted him, and he relapsed into the old cane-bottomed chair, wrung his hands together piteously, and glared at her who had bewildered him by her strange and awful statement.

What could it mean? What terrible secret did it portend? Beneath the everyday exterior of this monotonous business, the placid surface of that which had ever seemed to him two gentle, patient, uneventful lives, what deadly grievance or cruel ill-feeling had prevailed?

He was in a dream, and stupefied by all its wonderments. What mystery of the past, what irreparable wrong, could have held these two young women in silence for three years, living and working together, and sleeping under the same roof, and yet never exchanging a word with one another.

"For three years," he faltered forth at last, "and you two not speaking all the time!"

"We have grown used to the position; it is not painful to either of us now."

"But— Will you tell me——"

"John, I cannot tell you anything more," said Ellen, firmly; "I have betrayed too much already. You are never likely to know what has estranged my sister from me or me from her, and why we hate each other very bitterly."

"No, no—don't say that; it is not possible—you two!" he exclaimed.

"Ask her presently, if you will. Hear

what she says; repeat to her what I have told you," said Ellen Morison, excitedly again, "and then tell her your own story if you dare."

John felt already that he dared not, that in the past life of Mary Morison lay the barrier to any confession of the wild dream that he had had, and to any hope which he had formed. It would have been wiser if he had not told the elder sister—if his avowal had not, as it were, wrung forth the secret which these two silent women had jealously guarded from the world. He thought he would have been happier to have lived on in ignorance of so terrible a truth. He rose and walked towards the door in a dream-like fashion, as though the vision lasted still that had oppressed him. This was not real life yet—the stern reality of all his after-time. At the threshold he turned, for the sweet, pale face of Mary was looking towards him from the half-open door leading into the little parlour: he felt

that she had left her work and was nearer to him before he had glanced round. She remembered him, too, and that was marvellous, considering how Ellen had been perplexed at the first sight of him. She came towards him with hands extended and a faint smile of welcome flickering at her lips.

"Surely it is our old friend John Dax!" she cried, "and he has not deserted us for good."

"Not for good, Miss Mary," stammered the man. "I thought I would come and have a look at the old shop, just for once," he added.

"For once!" she repeated, wonderingly.

"Yes; I am going away presently—not yet," he said, with a great effort.

"Well, it was kind of you to think of us, John."

"As if I was likely to forget you—and your sister!" he said—"as if I haven't been telling her already how I remember the

goodness of you both when I was without a friend in the world !”

“We could not help you much,” said Mary, “but I hope we did our best.”

“You saved me,” said John Dax.

“Oh, no ; you saved yourself—with Heaven’s help,” answered Mary, warmly.

This was unlike a girl who could bear malice in her heart, and live for years in enmity with her sister ; surely it was Ellen’s fault that the great difference had arisen and existed. Mary was a woman all gentleness and sympathy. Why had he acted so rashly in the first moments of his return, and told Mary’s enemy the great secret, the great ambition of his life ?

Looking at Mary Morison, he felt that he could not lightly surrender his one hope, or believe in all that Ellen had told him. He would wait and watch for a while—no one understood his real character yet—the shadow of the streets was still upon him.

Mary Morison talked to him as to an old friend rather than an old servant. She heard the little story he had already related to her sister, with the exception of the money in trust upstairs, and concerning that he was silent; and Ellen stole away and left them together. The elder sister offered him his chance to speak, his opportunity to learn the truth for himself, but he would not avail himself of it; he was afraid to ask any question hingeing on the past or appertaining to the future; he had not the courage to risk so much again. To tell all that was in his heart was to shut away this dear face for ever from him; he could come no more after his mad avowal of attachment. He would be more discreet; he would be content with seeing her for a while and letting time plead for or against him. Under any circumstances, it was beyond his strength to say good-bye.

He thanked her for past kindness, as he had thanked her sister Ellen, but he hinted

not at the romance which had brought him to Gibbon Street. He expressed a wish to look in at the Gibbon Street shop now and then, and talk of old times, ask her advice and her sister's as to his future course in life, and she said that she should be glad to see him when he was disposed to visit them. He went away almost happy with that assurance, until all that Ellen Morison had told him rose up like a wall between him and his dream-land. In his own room in the Waterloo Road—he had never been far away from them—he was not sanguine of results, and his spirits sank to zero at the misty prospect lying beyond that day.

CHAPTER VI.

A TIME OF TRIAL.

PATIENCE was one of the rare virtues of our common-place hero. He had borne much in the old days without a murmur; in the time of his prosperity, and with a new ordeal to face, he was still the same uncomplaining individual. He was a man content to wait after all. For six months he had had the courage to keep away from Gibbon Street; for six months more he played the part of humble friend, and bided his time, although in the first impulse of his despair he had told Ellen Morison he could not come there.

True, he had another mission in life at first, and this kept him strong. If he were unrewarded by a sign of affection, still he was Mary's friend, in a way, and there came no one else to Gibbon Street; and the new task that he had set himself was to help towards a better understanding between the two sisters, and to endeavour by degrees, and by some common object of interest, to draw those two together who had drifted so strangely and awfully apart. It was a giant's task, and beyond his strength, but he did not learn that readily. He had faith in his powers in this direction, and the more he saw of the sisters Morison, the less he could believe in their unforgiving natures or deep-seated wrongs.

Either sister apart was gentle and affable, with the rare art of saying kind words in a kind fashion; little acts of neighbourly attention, of friendly service to folk poorer than themselves, told of earnest, thoughtful, charitable women, as forcibly as in the time

when John Dax was poor. How was it possible that to each other these two should remain obdurate as fate? Poor John was not a philosopher, or a man of any degree of depth; his little efforts to make them friends were exceedingly transparent; his futile appeals on trivial matters from one to another, when by some chance they were together, were very plain, and at times awkward, and finally they brought the schemer into trouble.

It was Mary Morison who faced him with reproof on this occasion. The days were drawing out towards the summer then, and John Dax called once or twice a week.

"I have seen for some time, John, that you are acquainted with a secret which my sister and I had hoped to hide from the world," she said to him one evening. "Will you tell me why you interfere?"

"You do not speak. I cannot understand how so long a quarrel as this can last," he answered, readily. "You will not blame

me, Miss Mary, for trying in my humble way to end it?"

"Why should you?" she inquired.

"It ain't natural: you and Miss Ellen should be the best of friends."

"It is unnatural, John, but it is not to be prevented. Do not interfere between us, please, or——"

She paused, and looked steadily at the young man, who said,

"Or what, Miss Mary? Don't be hard with me."

"Or it will be my place and hers to ask you not to come near us again—to keep away for good. For the good," she added, a moment afterwards, "of the three of us."

John was crestfallen. He could do no more after this. His own position, wherein he fairly hoped at times he had advanced a little, was in jeopardy, and he could not afford to be dismissed unceremoniously and for ever from her presence. If he could only save her from the misery of this isola-

tion by taking her to himself; if she would step some day from the eternal silence and gloom of that dreadful house—it had become dreadful to him now, knowing the ill feeling that was in it—and let him devote his life to making hers more happy than it possibly could be in her home; if she would only pity him—and herself!

Loving Mary Morison very truly, if very madly, it became natural on his part to distrust by degrees the elder sister, and to fancy that he read in Ellen's thoughtful gaze at him a growing dislike towards himself. He had sided indirectly with Mary; he had disregarded the advice of Ellen; he was there as often as excuses could take him to the house; he could not believe in any faults of the younger sister bringing about the cause of offence or distrust. In his place, and despite his effort, there was no stand to be taken on the neutral ground. Love held the scales, and turned the balance in Mary's favour.

"How long is this to last?" Ellen asked of him one day.

"Is what to last?" rejoined John, for the want of a better reply at the moment.

"This wasting of your life," was the sharp explanation proffered.

"Until I know the truth concerning her."

"And yourself, you mean?"

"Yes."

"It is very plain to see, but you come here with closed eyes," she said. "It is as I told you in the winter-time, and when you took no warning."

"I will hear all from your sister; let her give me my answer in good time."

"I am not likely to interfere between you; but you are not sane, John Dax, to dream on in this wilful fashion."

"It is not to be helped now," John said, moodily.

And it was not. He had erected his idol; it had been his task from the days of his vagabondage, when Mary Morison was

first kind to him, and when it collapsed it would crush him.

John Dax was not idle during his term of faithful service ; in acquiring money he had learned the value of it and the necessity of storing it. He was not living wholly on his means ; he had found employment, if not any great degree of pay, at a book-binder's, where he was slowly and laboriously, being somewhat dull of application, learning the craft. It would come in handy some day, when Mary had learned to like him, he thought at times, in the few sanguine moments which he had, and to which a kinder word or a brighter smile than ordinary would give birth. She blushed crimson, and turned her head from him at times, too—he was sure of that. Six months passed completely, and it was summer-time beyond the murky precincts of Gibbon Street, when Mary was missing from her customary post. The place behind the counter was occupied by Ellen

Morison, but the gas was turned low in the parlour when the long daylight had gone, and there was no one now at work within. John noticed this on the first visit, and it was so remarkable an occurrence, so out of the common track of the dulness of life at the repository, that he said, quietly, even nervously,

“Where’s Miss Mary?”

The face of the elder sister took a deeper shade of gloom as she answered, reluctantly,

“She is unwell to-day.”

“Not very unwell?” he asked.

“No, not very, I hope.”

John was not content with these laconic replies, but was compelled to accept them. He went away in a moody and dissatisfied condition, and the next morning he passed round by Gibbon Street on his way to business. The house was open, but there was no one in the shop or parlour, and he sat down and waited, with shaking hands and quivering lips, for some one to appear. His

passion had taken a strong hold upon him now, and he was a very child in his excitement. He did not know how weak he was; he hardly knew how deep had become his reverence for Mary Morison until there seemed some hidden danger threatening her.

Presently Ellen came downstairs, very pale and stern, and stared with surprise at John's early visit.

"I could not go to work until I knew how your sister was," he said, humbly and apologetically.

"She is no better," was the answer.

"Has a doctor been sent for?"

"Yes."

"What does he say? What does he think?" asked John.

"He says she is very weak and low."

"Pray have further advice. Let me—"

"She is in good hands; she will have the best attention," Ellen replied, gravely.

John Dax re-appeared in the evening,

and once more had to wait in the deserted shop, wherein the absence of its owner made but little difference to the business. He had something on his mind now which he wished to unburden to Ellen Morison, and he had been brooding upon it all day. It had stood between him and any honest application to work, and, at all hazards, he must say it.

When Ellen came downstairs at last, she said, quietly, as if she had expected to find him waiting there,

“She is no better, John.”

It was the same information as he had received from her in the morning, but it foreboded sadder news to him.

“No better!” he cried. “And you so calm as this!”

“Hush! hush!” she said, as an expression of pain flitted across her face. “It is my duty to be calm.”

“Is she in any danger?”

“God knows!” she replied. “The doc-

tor tells me there is nothing to fear at present."

"*At present!* Then——"

She laid her hand upon his arm by way of caution.

"You are too loud-voiced, John, and the sick-room is only a few stairs above us. She is sleeping now; don't wake her for the world."

"I beg pardon—I am very sorry," he said, in his new confused way; "but you know—oh, you can guess how her illness troubles me!"

"Yes," she said, looking at him sorrowfully, "it is not hard to guess; but do you think I have no trouble too?"

"Oh, yes, you must have now, for all these long years of injustice towards her."

"You are foolish and cruel," Ellen returned, half angrily. "How do you know I have been unjust?"

"You told me."

"It is she, poor woman! who—— But

there, I cannot explain to you. You must not talk of it at a time like this."

"You are kinder in your heart towards her; she is lying ill, dangerously ill: you speak to her now?"

"She does not speak to me," was the reply. "To hear my voice is to aggravate her fever."

"She shall not lie like this, neglected. Who is the doctor?—let me seek him out; let me tell him——"

"Nothing of our lives or of our enmity, if enmity it be now," she said, interrupting him. "John Dax, you must not interfere; leave her to me and to God."

She put her hands to her face, and murmured some low words, as of a prayer, before she took them down again, and John Dax had it not in his heart to distress her any more then. It was only in the streets, which he paced that night till a late hour, that the old doubts came back with tenfold force, that he thought down all the mani-

festations of the elder sister's grief, and read from the blurred pages of his heated brain a wild history of neglect and apathy, possibly revenge. He must interfere; he must warn some one of Ellen Morison, and of the old feud between her and her sister; he must not remain passive, with the woman whom he loved in danger, and that other woman, who surely hated her, her only nurse. His distrust was weakened again by the calm force of Ellen Morison's demeanour, when, more white and haggard than herself, he faced her the next morning.

Before he could ask the question, she had answered him, and for the third time with the old heart-crushing words,

"She is no better!"

"She is dying," John Dax raved, "and you are keeping it from me."

"No, no; there is hope—great hope, I pray," said Ellen. "Don't think that, my poor weak fellow."

"Why do you leave her to herself—that is, to yourself—when kind words, kind looks, are wanted to keep her brave and strong?" he cried. "Great Heaven! to think I can do nothing—that she is lying there without a friend!"

"I am the best friend she has in the world, perhaps," she murmured.

"It is not true—it can't be true!" cried John. "You have quarrelled with her; she never hears your voice."

"It would not benefit her now," said Ellen, wildly.

"You are wrong."

"No, I am right. She does not know who I am, or where she is; she is delirious."

John wrung his hands in his despair. He would have raved forth again in his grief had not Ellen's hand, as on the first day of tribulation, rested on his arm and checked him.

"I asked you yesterday to leave her to

me and to God," she said, very sternly. "I demand it to-day as my right. You must not come again to unnerve me. If you are thus childish, you had better keep away for her sake."

John was awed by her manner. Once again the belief that he had misjudged her stole to his mind ; once again, when he was away from her, all the doubts returned. By these doubts beset, he sought the doctor who attended at the sick-house, and harassed him with many questions, troubling him by injunctions as to secrecy as regarded his visit, and puzzling that worthy but small practitioner very much.

"She is in a critical state," he said, when closely pressed by John Dax's inquiries, "but in no immediate danger. She may rally suddenly from the fever, even, for she is young."

"Is she well nursed—well cared for?" asked John.

"She has her own sister, who watches night and day. Ellen Morison is killing herself with overnursing."

"Tell her so, please."

"I have told her so already, but it is no use."

John Dax groaned.

"Are you in any way related to my patient?" the doctor asked, curiously.

"No, sir."

"Ah! a sweetheart, perhaps," he said, with an effort to put a cheerful tone upon the subject of discourse; "if so, I hope I may give you permission to see her in a day or two."

"No, sir, not a sweetheart," he answered, mournfully; "but if I might only see her—only be sure——"

And then he came to a full stop, lest he should do Ellen Morison an irreparable injury by his doubts of her. There was innate heroism in this weak fellow's character;

he was distrustful, but he would not injure her by a word while there were only his own doubts to fight against.

The next day there was the same soul-depressing news; but on the day that followed there came hope.

"She is a little better."

On the day following that she was conscious, but very weak. It was the weakness now which Mary had to fight against, the doctor had said, only a few minutes ago, and from that she might sink if great care were not exercised. John waited for the doctor, who told him the same facts, regarding him very curiously and critically meanwhile.

On the third day of better news Ellen Morison came down and faced him with the old grave aspect.

"Not worse?" he cried, in new alarm.

"No, not worse."

"Better, then?"

"I hope so."

"The doctor has been?"

"Yes. He tells me that Mary is very anxious to see you."

"To see me!" exclaimed John. "She has thought of me, then—spoken of me?"

"Yes. Will you go upstairs and see her? Can I trust you to be calm, whatever she says?"

"You can."

"Her life may be in your hands, remember, but she will see you now."

"I am so glad of that!"

"Ah! do not be mistaken in this hour, for the truth is very near to you."

"Do you know what she is going to say, then?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I do."

John looked inquiringly at her, but she pointed to the narrow stairs on the right of the parlour, and he went up

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them with a faltering step and a heart
that beat wildly with surprise, fear, and
even joy.

CHAPTER VII.

CONFESSION.

JOHN DAX went softly into the room where the one romance of his life was sinking fast away. Surely sinking from life, as well as from romance, was the wan and wasted figure lying there, with two great anxious eyes regarding him very wistfully as he entered.

“Oh! poor Mary!” murmured the man, as he advanced with noiseless step to the bedside, where she seemed to vanish for a while in the thick mist which rose before him.

There was a silence of some moments, for

John was mastering his emotion and growing brave by slow degrees ; he had promised Ellen Morison that he would not break down, and was fighting hard to keep his word. It would disturb Mary, too, and that was of more importance than any promise he had made. Presently Mary spoke, and in so faint a whisper that he had to lower his head to catch her words.

“You must not mind my asking you to my room, John,” she said, “but it is hard to guess when I may be downstairs again. I have been anxious about you for some time—very, very anxious to tell you something.”

“I am listening,” said John. “Don’t hurry ; there is plenty of time.”

He sat down by the bedside, and laid his hand for an instant on her arm, which was too weak to stir beneath his gentle pressure. The mist rose up before his eyes again, and his heart beat very fast. Was she going to

tell him that she had read his secret—he who had made no sign of his affection, and had been always grave and silent and submissive, like the poor waif whom her charity had warmed to love long years ago? Was she going to pity him, and say good-bye? Was she going to tell him that with health and strength returning she might learn to love him in good time, and that he must take heart and grieve for her no longer? Had the feud ended between the sisters, as at such a time as this it should have done, and had Ellen told her of his passion? Was he as near the truth as she was nigh unto death in that hour?

“You seem to have been my friend so long, John,” she continued—“to be the only one left to me.”

“You are very kind to say so, Mary. May I call you Mary now?”

“If you will,” she answered; “if you wish it.”

"Yes, I wish it," he murmured; "and if it is no offence to you," he added, anxiously, "for, after all, I——"

"You are the one friend I have," she repeated. "When I came back from all those dreadful dreams, I thought of you first as one on whom I could rely."

"God bless you for that!"

"I knew you would aid me, and not be too severe with me."

"I am glad to help, of course," replied John, somewhat bewildered.

"I cannot ask Ellen; you know I dare not speak to her," she said, in a more excited whisper.

"Not now? Will she not speak even in this hour?" asked John. "Will——"

"Hush! not her fault, but mine," said she, interrupting him. "I am weighed down by an awful oath which I dare not, will not, break. There is no help for it, unless you help me."

"Is it in *my* power?"

"I pray it is—I think it is," she answered.

"Ah! there is no happier task you can set me, Mary," he cried.

"You were always warm-hearted, John—kind, unselfish, faithful," murmured Mary.

"The little good I ever brought to your life will be repaid a hundredfold to-day."

"What can I do?"

"You must put your hand on mine again, and promise to forgive the poor weak girl lying here before you. That is the beginning, John, of—of all that is to come!"

She was very feverish and nervous again. In the excitement she struggled hard to raise her voice, and he hastened to assure her and to calm her.

"I promise to do everything, Mary; but you know—you must know—that I have nothing to forgive," he cried. "Great Heaven! what have you ever been to me but the one blessing of my life?"

"A man different from yourself might learn to curse me, John."

"No, no."

"For I have been very weak and guilty, and it is my crime that has helped to lay me low," she replied. "I—I discovered long ago that there was money in that parcel which you left in trust to me, and I have spent it all—given it all away to bring back hope to me! Pity me, forgive me. I could not live on in my misery any longer!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRUEL TRUTH.

MARY MORISON'S avowal was a revelation unlooked for by John Dax, but he bore it with equanimity. He was startled, even thunder-struck, for an instant by the confession of the sick girl, but not a muscle of his countenance betrayed him.

"Is that all?" he said, cheerfully. "Why, it *was* yours; it was always intended for you, Mary."

For him and her if they should ever marry; for her if he should die; for her at any time, even, if distress were near and

money wanted ; and surely it had been wanted at a time of need, for her to touch it without consultation with himself. He could not blame her, could not express even surprise, lest she should think he was hurt. If it could make her happy or set her mind at rest to say that it was freely hers, why, let him say it readily. He did not grudge her the possession of it.

"For me—that money?" she said, wonderingly.

"Yes, for you. What did I want with it when you were struggling on here?"

"You did not say so."

"I thought you understood it."

"If I had, it might have saved me many weeks of mental torture, John," she said, "and —— Why should I have had the money?"

"You were kind to me in the old days."

"Why, so was Ellen."

"But not with your kindness. There, say no more about it," he urged ; "your

cheeks are red. This is putting you out. I won't listen."

"John, I must tell you all," she cried. "I shall never know rest till you have heard my miserable story."

"Cannot your sister Ellen tell me as well as you?" asked John.

"Yes, presently; part of the story, not all. She does not know about the money."

"We have explained all about that."

"Not why I took it—why I robbed you, John."

"It was not robbery. But go on, my poor girl."

"Why Ellen and I for years have stood apart, she will tell you in good time. What a cruel jealousy it was! what bitter misunderstandings! for we were both in love with him."

"With *him*!—oh!" repeated John, in his amazement.

"But I loved him best, though latest. I did not know, to begin with, that I was

breaking Ellen's heart to love him and to let him love me back ; but I think it broke when he liked me," Mary continued. "She turned upon us then ; she separated us ; she set my poor father and mother against him—even me, for a while—and in despair he enlisted for a soldier. Then my heart broke too, I think sometimes."

"This is the story that your sister should tell me, not you," said John Dax, very moodily. "For God's sake spare yourself!"

"And me," he might have added in that hour of his bitterest discomfiture.

"Well, well, you guess now why Ellen and I can never speak. When I discovered it was by her means he had been led to doubt me, I swore to Heaven that I would not speak to her in all my life again till he came back to me. It was wrong, but I have kept my word—I may die keeping it. It is best, perhaps, to face my Maker without a lie upon my lips."

"You will live. Don't talk like this," said John.

"I may live if he come back to me. Oh, John, I love him so dearly! He is the one hope of my life; he is true to me still. I would be at peace with Ellen, and for this, and more than this, I have been working all my life, with Ellen ever aiding me in silence."

"I do not make out," he began, in his old confused manner, when she commenced anew.

"Let me finish, please, before my voice gives way," she entreated. "Yes, Ellen and I have been working on for years to purchase his discharge, and we have been always baulked at the eleventh hour. It has been impossible to save. We have tried hard, and we have been always so poor! He seemed beyond all hope when the regiment was ordered to India, until the discovery and the temptation of your money came to me—not Ellen; never to her, who

had outlived all love for him. I schemed on ; I wrote to the Commander-in-chief's office ; I studied all the rules by which he might be brought to me. Finally, in desperation, with your money, John—forgive me once again !—I bought his liberty, his passage home from India, and he is on his way to me at last."

She had forgotten her fault in the thought of his return again ; John could see that by the light upon her face. Ah ! woman is weak.

"When will he return ?" asked John, in a hoarse voice.

"Soon, I hope," she whispered—"very soon."

There was a long pause. The confession had been made, and John Dax had offered all the absolution in his power. But he did not move away at once from the bedside ; he sat there, stupefied by the revelation which had been made, and which had cut down every fair green shoot of promise his

own folly had allowed to spring up in the desert of his uncomplaining life.

He had served long and waited long, and failed. There are some men who seem born to wait always, and to fail in everything on which their hearts are set, and John Dax was one of these.

"You have not told me again I am forgiven, John," said Mary, faintly, at last.

"I have nothing to forgive," said John, in reply, as he rose. "Always believe I meant the money for you; I never thought of it for myself."

He wished that he could have spent the money in her cause as she had spent it; that was the one regret concerning it. And it was of the man who had been saved, and not of the money which had saved him, that kept him very thoughtful.

"You say this to set my mind at ease," she added.

"Don't think that. And now, God bless you, Mary!"

“Presently we shall pay you back, when Alec——”

“Don’t say anything more to me, please ; you are very weak still. Good-bye.”

He rested his large thin hand upon hers again for an instant, and then passed out of the room.

CHAPTER IX.

ELLEN IS GRATEFUL.

IT was thus that the idol fell which John Dax had worshipped. A wild fancy had given way to reality, and Mary Morrison, of Gibbon Street, was a poor weak mortal after all. In her passion and despair she had betrayed the trust which John had placed in her, and taken his money to restore a lover to her side. The man's legacy had been the means of destroying the one hope that he had ever had ; he had shut himself out of the daylight for good. He understood now why Mary had blushed and trembled of late days, and before her

illness, at meeting him occasionally : it was remorse. There was no wild thrill of pleasure at that recollection now ; his romance was at an end. After all, it was only the romance of a back street ; and what could such a hero as John Dax have expected ?

He went downstairs into the parlour, where Ellen awaited him. She looked anxiously into his face, and said, reprovingly,

"You have let her talk too much ; you have been inconsiderate."

He was always in the wrong, poor fellow !

"I have been as careful as I could," he said, by way of excuse ; "but your sister had a good deal to tell me."

"Of our long quarrel ?" she inquired, moodily. "Ah ! it was hardly necessary that you should know it."

"I think it was," he answered, thoughtfully.

"And yet she was anxious about you of late days. There was a reason for it, I suppose?" she asked, a little curiously.

John Dax saw his opportunity here. Even in his disappointment he was considerate for the woman he loved.

"Yes, Miss Ellen, there was a reason. The money upstairs—you remember."

"What of that?" was the quick inquiry. "She—she never——"

"It was lent to her to buy Alec's discharge, to pay his passage back to England, to help him in any way upon his journey," said John Dax, coolly and firmly.

"Lent by you—for her sake!" exclaimed Ellen.

"What use was the money to me, when she was fretting for the soldier away in India?"

"You can never be repaid," said Ellen.

"I don't care to be," answered John, "though I am not so sure of it, for all that."

"John," said Ellen, seizing his hand in

hers, "I did not think you could be so kind and generous as this. Why did you not tell me before?"

"It was a little surprise of mine," he said, with a short laugh.

"A surprise indeed. And you have known Mary's love-story all the while, and sympathized with her and helped her, and forgotten your own poor foolish dreams! And yet——"

John interrupted her second train of thought.

"I have not known everything very clearly till to-day," he said; "there was a little mystery—not much—and Miss Mary has set that right at last. As for Alec"—he spoke as if he had known his rival and had been interested in him for years, and his manner of recital helped to deceive his listener—"although I shall be glad to see him back for your sister's sake, I think I shall be gladder for yours."

"What do you mean?"

"His coming back will end the long quarrel, won't it?"

She flushed crimson, and wrung her hands silently together.

"She was never to *speak* to me till he came back again," she murmured, "and he is on his way. Yes," she added, gravely, "for that one reason I shall be glad to see him."

"I thought you would. You don't bear malice now?"

"Malice!" she repeated, quickly. "Do you think I——" Then she paused, and looked at John attentively, and substituted another question for the one that remained half finished on her lips.

"Has Mary told you the story of our quarrel?"

"Most of it. She said you would tell the rest."

"How I loved Alec Williamson first, and how she came between us?"

"Yes, and how you continued to separate them until——"

"Until, in the bitterness of his disappointment, he enlisted for a soldier, poor martyr," she said, sadly rather than bitterly. "Well, well, John, let her version of the story stand; it is not deserving of further explanation, and I am too proud to offer it."

She looked a very proud woman at that moment, John thought, and he regarded her as an enigma very difficult to solve. For an instant there flitted across the dull mind of this one-ideaed man the suspicion that it was Ellen Morison who had been injured and cast down, and who was deserving of all kindly consideration, from the early days of a cruel disappointment until now; and then he thought of Mary lying ill upstairs, and his charity sided with his pity for her. Mary had been deceived, and her unforgiving sister Ellen was the evil genius of her life—that was how he read the legend to the last. He was wrong;

but he was not the first to misjudge a woman, and think the worst of her when she was at her best. It is a man's prerogative and woman's fate occasionally.

"There is one favour I want to ask of you before I go away this morning," John said, after a long silence between them. It had been in his mind from the hour of Mary's revelation to him, and he had not found the courage to mention it till he was standing at the door ready to depart.

"You cannot ask a favour of us that will be refused, if it lie in our power to grant it," she exclaimed, readily.

"It is in your power only."

"What is it?"

"When I first came back I spoke of my foolish love for the poor girl upstairs."

"Yes."

"It died out, of course—that is, any hope I had died off clean when I heard about the soldier, and when we were arrang-

ing our plans to buy him off, and so on."

"I am glad you did not brood upon it at all," said Ellen.

"And my only trouble now is that Mary—Miss Mary, as I ought to call her still," he added, apologetically—"should ever hear of my silly fancy for her. I don't want anybody to know this. I wish I'd never told you a word about it now."

"It might do her good to hear the story some day," mused Ellen.

"No, it wouldn't," John said, flatly contradicting her; "and it makes me look soft and stupid. I'm both; I know that; you know it too, and are smiling at me, though you try hard to look serious; but I couldn't help liking her a great deal once. But don't tell her so—ever—will you?"

"I will not," Ellen Morison promised.

"That's right," said John, evidently relieved in his mind. "I can go back to my work now jolly. It seems all squaring

round so well. Miss Mary getting stronger, forgetting and forgiving everything you have done to her, and her young man coming back from India to make her heart light for ever and ever. Why, this is capital."

"And all this your doing," said Ellen, gratefully; and her hands were extended towards him again. "It is from your sacrifice that the happiness will spring. What have we done to deserve it?"

"You were kind to me in the old days," he stammered forth. "I can't forget it."

"And, John, we will never forget you."

"Thankee, thankee," he said, twice.

"Our only friend, our best friend, God bless you!" she said, gratefully. Then she released his hand and let him go away, standing and watching his thoughtful progress down the street, and whispering her blessing after him again. He was not deserving of it. He had not acted as she thought he had. Mary had not left him

the chance of being worthy of one poor woman's gratitude. Of these three shadowy characters of Gibbon Street not one fairly understood the other to the end of time.

CHAPTER X.

“HAPPY TOGETHER.”

JOHN DAX had become a hero in spite of himself, and there was no dropping the character. There were two young women grateful to him : Mary, for his forgiveness, his warm-heartedness, and all he had said to assure her that the money was her own to dispose of as best pleased her ; and Ellen, because he had done so much to bring happiness to the repository. It had not come yet, but he was none the less a hero. Heroism had been thrust upon him, and it did not seem at first glance as if it were agreeing with him. A good action

had scarcely been its own reward, and he was dull and grave, until the question came uppermost one day, Did he regret all that he had done to help them ?

No, no ; he did not regret it ; he was not sorry he had parted with his money to bring back Alec Williamson ; he was glad of it ; but he should not be truly happy until the lover's return. This, or something like this, was his reply ; he was only thoughtful for fear that his efforts had been in vain, and that the better times would never come.

For these assurances he was always welcome to Gibbon Street. Mary knew why he talked in this strain, and took the task on himself to screen her from suspicion. Ellen only read a noble and disinterested nature in the man who had done so much for them. There were bright smiles and friendly pressures of the hand for John Dax now. The shadow of his past estate

did not fall upon him. They had forgotten their rescue of him from the streets in the winter's snow. They respected him, nay, revered him, as a man who had done much to clear away the clouds about their lives.

He came every day till Mary was downstairs again, and Ellen at her old post behind the counter. Here was the same situation as of old, but they three were waiting for the change to it. There was a shimmer of happiness already about the house. There were smiles exchanged between the sisters. There was no bitter wrong now, only the affliction of a rash vow which both were sorry for, and of which both were longing to see the end.

And the beginning of the end came when Mary had been downstairs a fortnight.

John Dax was proceeding at his usual slow rate down Gibbon Street one evening, when Ellen, cloaked and bonneted, met

him on his way to the repository. He would have passed without seeing her, had she not caught him by the arm.

"Ah! Ellen, is that you? There's nothing the matter, I hope?" he added, as he became aware that she was paler than usual.

"There is nothing wrong, but there is something the matter, John," said Ellen: "can't you guess what it is?"

"Yes, I think I can," he answered.

They walked on in silence for a few steps, then John said,

"He has come back?"

"Yes."

"He is at the repository?"

"Yes."

"Was Mary very pleased to see him?" was his third question.

"Very pleased," answered Ellen. "I did not hear what she said. I came into the street and left them together. I could not stop."

"Not to speak a word to Mary, after all these awful years!" he exclaimed.

"I shall see her presently," replied Ellen, becoming a shade paler beneath his sharp reproof. "I did not wish to mar the first moments of their meeting by my interference. They will not miss me, and I thought I would come and meet you."

John did not thank her for the trouble she had taken—did not think of thanking her. It did not strike him that she had left her work and come out of her way to spare him the sting of the first shock—to prepare him for the fact of Alec Williamson's return. He did not even know that he needed preparation, but Ellen Morison did. She had watched him closely of late days, and knew how weak he was, for all his air of self-command.

"The happiness has come at last. I am glad," he said, in a low tone, as Ellen turned and walked back with him in the direction of home.

"Very glad?" she asked, curiously.

"Yes," he answered, with more firmness than she had anticipated. "It settles the matter, you see."

"I think I see more than this," she said.

"What's that?" he asked, with eagerness.

"That you are the most unselfish man whom I ever met."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"The one unselfish man, I might have said," she added, drily; "and yet there was a time when Mary and I looked down upon you, pitied you, and patronized you."

"And if it had not been for your pity and your patronage—"

"Pray don't be grateful to us any more," said Ellen, shivering. "The times are changed, and we have changed places with them. Here is home."

"It will be like home at last, I hope," said John.

"Amen. I hope so," answered Ellen Morison.

They walked into the shop together. John hung back, and took a long deep breath as they approached the parlour, but Ellen Morison went in with unflinching gaze and a step that faltered not. She had the courage to face the old love boldly, but then the love had died out, and was past any chance of renewal.

She went towards her sister, sitting by her lover's side, with her hand in his, and said,

"Mary."

The younger sister was weak still; she rose trembling in every limb, and put her wasted arms round Ellen's neck.

"At last," she whispered; then both women were unnerved for a little while.

Ellen was the first to recover. She turned to John and confronted him with Alec, a broad-chested, tawny-haired, and handsome Scotchman, for ever on the smile—as well he might be, at that early stage of his return.

"This is the best friend we have ever had in our lives," said Ellen. "Your best friend too, Alec, for it was his money that saved you."

"Sir, I thank ye," said Alec, in a broad accent, as he rose and crushed our hero's fingers somewhat remorselessly in his own. "I am proud to make yer acquaintance; a freend of my Mary's is a freend of mine for life, sir—for life."

"You are very good," said John, when he had got his hand out of the vice.

"You will be glad to hear, John," said Mary, "that Alec has seen some of his relations, and he is likely to obtain a situation almost at once."

"Yes, I am glad of that," echoed John.

"In a wholesale warehouse—somewhere. Then we shall begin saving for you," cried Mary, "putting by something every week——"

"If ever so little," added Alec, cautiously.

"—To pay off the debt we owe you."

"You need not trouble about that—for a year or two," answered John.

"Sit ye down, mon, sit ye down; ye ha'e been a guid freend to us," cried Alec, heartily. And John sat down for a few minutes, and stared at the fire, and thought himself very much in the way of all this happiness, which had come in a great rush to Gibbon Street at last.

He was uncomfortably conscious, too, that Ellen Morison watched him more furtively than he watched the lovers; and he resented this in his heart.

He did not like to meet her eyes—to see in them a concern for him, a fear lest he should break down and make a scene there, as if he were not above that kind of thing, and strong as a lion! He had accomplished his task, and everyone was content, and it would soon be time for him to leave these lovers to themselves, although it was difficult to quit them in the face of their united protestations for him to remain. Presently they

seemed to forget him more, and to talk in a lower tone of the past and the future ; and, without much respect for the " proprieties," Alec put his arm round Mary's waist and drew her close to his side, while the fair young head drooped trustfully and affectionately upon the shoulder of her lover.

Now and then Alec addressed the company generally, talked a little of India, a great deal of his chances in the world, and a great deal more about himself, allowing his listeners to see, if they cared to see, that he had a very strong idea in his own mind that he was a clever sort of fellow. He was hardly the hero whom John had pictured as claiming Mary Morison—he was too big and boisterous and beefy—but he loved the little dressmaker very much, and Mary was very fond of him, and they would live happily for ever afterwards.

John Dax was interested in his conversation.

"I should think soldiering not a bad idea for a man, take it all together," he observed.

"Ay, for a mon who gaes awa' to serve his countrie honestly," cried Alec, "for there's glory in it. But it's vera ill soldierin' with a trooble or a wrang at the heart."

"Ay, but for a fellow with no ties, no wrongs, no troubles, nothing to keep him at a trade, and only an empty top room that he can call his home, I should say the army was the thing, now."

"Why, *you* are not thinking of the army, John?" said Mary, with a merry little laugh at the idea.

"Why should I?" rejoined John, laughing too for a minute, and while Mary was looking at him; and then the subject was dismissed, and the lovers began to whisper together again.

John Dax was sure that he must be considerably in the way; he was quite sure of it when Alec and Mary forgot him alto-

gether, and Alec's big red whisker, the left one, was crushed against the cheek of his betrothed, and Alec looked down into her eyes, and once kissed her unblushingly before company. There was no particular etiquette about this kind of thing in Gibbon Street, and John was not shocked at the demonstration. He was only certain that it would be perfectly advisable to get away from it all, and, when a chance customer took Ellen into the shop, he seized the opportunity of the door being ajar to walk softly from the parlour too. He was right. Alec and Mary did not know that he was gone, that he was passing cautiously, almost on tiptoe, across the shop towards the fresh air beyond. He looked at Ellen, and nodded a good night, and from her post behind the counter she said,

"Wait an instant, John."

He waited at her request till the customer was served, standing at the door and looking dreamily down the ill-lighted street.

Ellen Morison startled him at last by her hand upon his shoulder.

"Have you bidden them good-bye?" she asked.

"No, no; they were busy——"

"Busy?"

"That is, they were very happy sweet-hearting," he said, "and it was a pity to disturb them."

"But you are going away for a long while?"

"How do you know?" asked John, surprised at this exhibition of clear-sightedness.

"I read it in your face to-night. Is it not true?"

"Well, yes; for——"

"For what?"

"For it's no use coming to trouble either of you again. I—I shan't want to come now."

"They will be glad to see you at the wedding."

"Oh, no," cried John; "no, thank you!"

"You are her friend and mine, and we are short of friends. Mary will go soon to her new home, and I shall be very lonely here, if even *you* will not look in to say good evening sometimes."

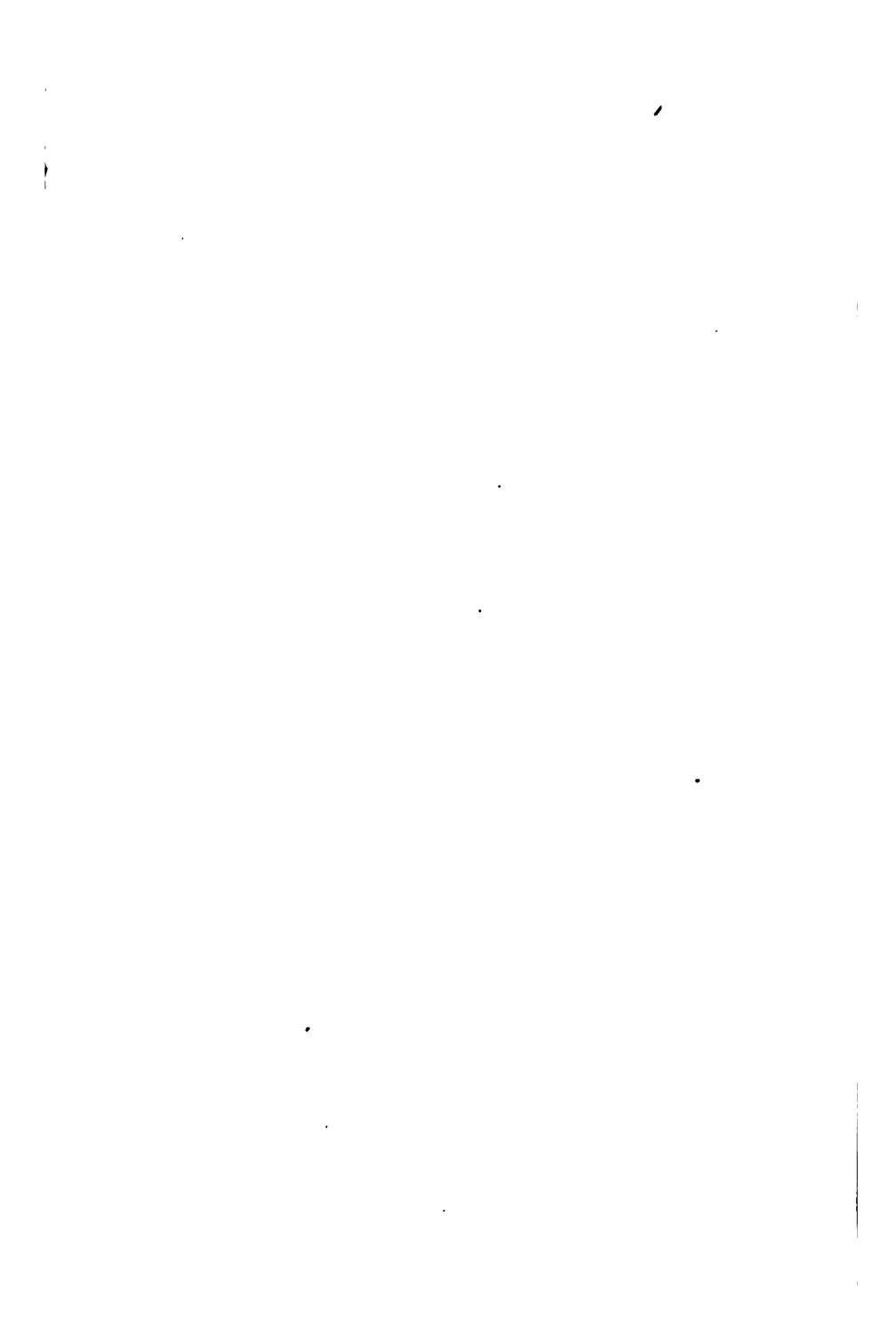
Her voice faltered, but he did not perceive it. If she were making love to him—and these young dressmakers are astonishingly forward at times—he never knew it, never took the hint conveyed by Ellen's manner, never thought it possible to be loved even by a good-looking girl a little older than himself. He had sketched forth his future, too, and he went away that night in search of it.

He bade Ellen good-bye; he desired her to remember him kindly, most kindly to Mary and to Alec. He promised to write some day even, so that they might know where to send the money to him when they wanted: and then Ellen Morison watched him out of her sight into the night mists that were thick in Gibbon Street, and

through which the lonely man was never seen returning to a woman still more lonely than himself.

John Dax enlisted for a soldier, and died of fever on the Gold Coast before he had time to smell powder. Even in the pursuit of glory, it was his ill fortune to meet Yellow Jack instead. He was one of the many who are for ever out of luck's way.

ALL THROUGH BROWN.



ALL THROUGH BROWN.

I*T was* through Brown!—there's very little doubt about that. Without Brown I should have been a happier man. It was **ALL** through Brown!—Montgomery Brown—more familiarly known to his friends and acquaintances as Gommery Brown. I generally called him Montgomery. I hate calling people out of their names—it's offensive—although he always called me Ginger. Not that my name is Ginger, or anything like it—it's Kirkpatrick, which is of Irish extraction, and nothing to do with Ginger in any way. I

have an impression that he alluded to my hair, although I am sure that no friskiness of deportment was ever apparent in my conduct to warrant him in bestowing upon me so absurd an appellative. But he called me Ginger !

Brown and I were schoolfellows together at the Muddleborough National School, so there is a tie between us. A tie, as it were, of sympathy, which began with his borrowing my pocket-knife and keeping it, and has ended in—but I will not anticipate, although it was all through Brown, every bit of it.

To begin, then, you might have knocked me down with a feather when one bright summer's morning Montgomery Brown walked into my shop for a three half-penny shave. We had not crossed each other's path from the painful and eventful day when he was flogged for apple-stealing—he was a small boy then, in corduroys, and I was his senior and had to hold him

down. To think that I should have to hold him down again!—lightly by the tip of his nose, whilst I went over his chin with one of my patent razors—Kirkpatrick's Patent Army Rasp, 1s. 9d.! I was shaving him dexterously, when Fate—it was certainly Fate—led me to inquire if his name was Brown.

Yes, it was Brown.

Montgomery Brown?

"Yes, Montgomery Brown," he replied, with an emphasis on his "gom."

"I should never have known you!" I exclaimed, which was paradoxical, when I came to reflect upon it; "and I suppose you don't remember me?"

"I'm hanged if I do," said Brown.

He was almost rude at this first stage of our re-union; but then I take time to understand. I have known hasty people set me down as "soft" until they have had a little conversation with me, and drawn me out a little.

“Didn’t you go to Muddleborough School some fifteen years ago?”

“Well—ah—hum—yes, I did.”

“Don’t you recollect the row about the apples?”

“Can’t say I do.”

“Don’t you remember Kirkpatrick, one of the big boys?”

“There was a lot of big boys knocking about,” he answered, rather flippantly; “were you one of that lot?”

“No, I wasn’t. I was the boy who always took your part—Teddy Kirkpatrick.”

“Didn’t I call you Ginger?” he inquired.

“No, you didn’t.”

But he has called me Ginger ever since, which is very remarkable.

This was not a good beginning of friendship—did not seem likely to lead to any friendship whatever—and, when he gave me my three-halfpence, and left the shop without bidding me good morning, I can-

not truthfully confess that my heart bounded after him into the street. I thought he was arrogant and purse-proud—"stuck-up," as the vulgar say—but I fancy I was wrong now. It is not a wise thing to be too hasty with your verdicts on your fellow-creatures—oh, no! Brown told me afterwards very frankly—and I will say that Brown is an outspoken fellow, with all his faults—that it struck him he had not run across such an idiot as I was for a long while, although, of course, he found himself very much mistaken. Ha! ha! I should think so.

When I met Montgomery again, it was in the bar-parlour of the "Fox and Goose." Just where I might have expected to meet him, Mrs. Kirkpatrick has remarked satirically since, but that is Mrs. K.'s way when she is put out. Confidentially, I may as well add here that it does not take a great deal to put Mrs. K. out, and that, with all her virtues and accomplishments, she is

unfortunately destitute at times of that calmness and self-possession for which her sex is pre-eminently distinguished. Mrs. Kirkpatrick can be even violent when she has made up her mind to it, and occasionally she *does* make up her mind to it. "A worm will turn," is her favourite observation ; and she is a kind of worm, with an objectionable habit of turning when you least expect it. I have reasoned with her more than once on this peculiarity, but not with much success at present. When she fails clearly to see the force of my remonstrance, she flings something at me, and then I go out of the house and meditate in the bar-parlour of the "Fox and Goose" till I think she has calmed down, and I can return home in safety. If it wasn't for her temper, Mrs. K. would be simply angelic—for her age.

I was meditating at the "Fox and Goose" one Saturday evening, when Montgomery Brown marched in—I may say as

though the inn belonged to him—and took up the best place in front of the fire—it was the landlord's place—and called for four of Scotch whisky, hot. It was on that particular occasion that we exchanged confidences, and renewed the friendship of our early youth. I told him, I remember, I was married—exceedingly much married, as the funny people say—and that I had offered my hand and heart, some three years since, to Mrs. Tibbins, relict of old Tibbins, to whom I had been apprenticed as an ornamental hair-dresser, and that she had accepted me. She has said since that I married her for the business, but she was a fine woman, and I loved her for her proportions. There was no attraction in the business for me; a man does not marry a woman older than himself for the sake of three dozen dressing-combs, a gross of pomatum pots, two wax dummies in the shop window, and a large hair-brush that goes round by machinery. An un-

selfish disposition is above such temptations as those.

No, I married Selina Tibbins for love. I respected her strength of mind and decision of character. And she respects me, too, although she wonders what would have become of her poor Teddy—I'm her poor Teddy!—if he hadn't had a practical woman to take care of him. You see, Mrs. Kirkpatrick has a sense of humour in her; indeed, if it were not for her jealous disposition—and she is terribly and absurdly jealous at times—she would be as near perfection—— But I have said something like this just now.

Once more, I wish you all to understand very clearly that I married her for herself alone—*not* for the business—and, if the experiment has been a failure, it was not my fault—or Selina's. It was all through Brown.

I don't like to boast, but *I* made that business. It was not much in old Tibbins's

time—there was no style about it. Tibbins had no imagination, no “Patent Army Rasps,” nothing! He would have never thought of the Golden Showery Flowery Hair Annihilator—I mean Renovator—which was the making of our shop in the High Street, half-a-crown small bottles, large bottles six shillings—but, mind you, they hold three of the little ones, and you’ll want three, if your hair won’t come up in a hurry!

“Kirkpatrick’s Renovator” is at least a hundred a year to me. I told Brown so that night at the “Fox and Goose.” In fact, I told him a great deal about my business, as he seemed anxious to know. Anxious to know everybody’s business, Mrs. K. says, but then she doesn’t like Brown. In fact, it was all through Brown that—but there, I am precipitate again! I find it difficult to proceed calmly with this story. I am madly impatient to leap towards the crisis, to tell you why Brown

—but we will not anticipate the tragedy. There is time enough to put the shutters up before the stock in trade of one's happiness.

When Brown heard I was doing a good business with "Rasps" and "Renovators," and so forth, he was as pleased as if he had been in luck's way himself, which he wasn't. He congratulated me—he wished me many happy returns of the day, that is, of the profits ; he said he had always predicted that I should turn out an inventive genius, and it was the proudest moment of his life to discover he was right. He remembered the Muddleborough National Schools, too ; he had been thinking of the past ever since I had shaved him !

"Don't you recollect the apples, Ginger, and what a row there was about them ?"

"I should think I did. Why, when you first came into my shop I told you."

"Oh ! yes ; but can I ever forget how

you tried to soothe me in my troubles, and how you whispered in my ear, 'Never mind, Gommery, it'll soon be over,' when—but these are painful recollections, aren't they?"

"I don't know. Time has hallowed them to me."

"Hallowed be da——. I should like to meet old Thrashem now—that's all. Lor', didn't he hurt!"

"I mean that the sacred past——"

"Are you romantic, Ginger?"

"I—I don't think I am."

"Do you read poetry?"

"Yes; I read poetry. I—I write a little of it, too."

"*You!*"

"Mind you, *only* a little—not much."

"What kind of poetry do you write?" he asked.

"Oh! anything. I have published an ode to the Golden Hair Wash lately."

"Have you, though? How deuced clever you must be," he added, with a sigh over his own utter incompetence.

After this we had two more "go's" of whisky hot, and he would have paid for them, if I had allowed it; but I insisted on settling the account, and he took his hand out of his pocket with a sigh.

"If you insist," he said, "what can I do?"

"Brown," said I, solemnly and suddenly, "you're not happy."

Brown had just raised his second glass to his lips, when I caught him impulsively by the arm, and jarred his teeth and his feelings.

"Don't you do that again, or I'll loosen something of yours," he said, a little angrily, before he saw that my solicitude was real, and it was only my impulse which had hurt him. "No, I ain't happy," he confessed.

"I am sorry to hear it, Brown."

"Thank you," he murmured; "but don't call me Brown. For ever after this night let it be Gommery."

It has been Gommery.

"And why is the companion of my boy—hic—hood's days unhappy?" I inquired.

Montgomery looked sadly at me, at the clock over the door, at the landlord, who was sulking in the corner of the room away from the fire, and whispered—

"I am the slave of circumstances."

"Lord bless me!"

"The creature of a despot."

"A what pot?" I had not caught his words clearly, he had spoken in so subdued a tone.

"A despot—a tyrant—the bloated oligarch, McRashie."

"Bless my soul! What, McRashie, the draper, at No. 200?"

"The draper!" he cried, in a tone of withering sarcasm—and oh! Brown *can* wither when he likes—"the tally-man—

the-weekly-payments-taken-and-look-sharp-about-'em-or-I'll-bag-the-blessed-lot-man—the-articles-in-the-window-that-don't-match-the-articles-behind-the-counter-man — yes, I'm the minion of that wretch! I have come down to *him*!"

"Well, it is hard."

I had never liked McRashie myself. He had recently sold my wife a cotton print which was warranted to wash—and so it did too; it washed itself to rags in the first boil! I told Brown that.

"Just like him," said Brown; "but what's that to washing all the noble nature out of a man's soul?"

"Ah, Brown, that's a heavy wash indeed!"

Montgomery looked at me as though he suspected chaff. As if chaff was in me! —as if, when a man is torn by emotion, another man is worthy of the name of his fellow-man who can chaff! I said something like this when I saw he doubted me,

and he shook me by the hands till I shed tears. We had two more glasses of Scotch whisky, hot. I wouldn't let Brown pay for them, either ; I was above that sort of thing now with a friend who was unhappy, and the slave of a flesh-pot—despot—at my side.

It was getting late when Brown had imparted to me all his history. There was not much in it, and what there was would not have been particularly interesting to anyone but a bosom friend—I was his bosom friend, he told me over our final glasses of whisky, Scotch, hot, as the barman was shutting up for the night. His had not been a chequered career ; he had been apprenticed to a draper's at Islington, served his time, been cashier, shopman, and shop-walker, and, having quarrelled with his employers about "a beggarly ten-pound rise in his screw," as he called it, had come to settle down in his native town of Muddleborough, at the

respectable and old-established firm of McRashie & Co., in the High Street.

"I don't say, Ginger, that it is a great post—that I'm not fitted for something better than this—but still it's position."

"Exactly."

"It wants a superior sort of man—an engaging bloke, Ginger—to catch the eye, and impress the customers when you are walking up and down the premises. Now it wouldn't suit you at all."

"No, it's not in my line," I confessed.

"I like a popular position. I thirst for distinction and power. I thirst for—shall we have any more whisky?"

"I don't think I care about any more," I replied. "I—I don't fancy Mrs. Kirkpatrick would care for my having any more."

"Ginger, your wife is a tyrant and you're a slave."

"I beg your pardon."

"Base is the man who—Ginger, I can't

part without telling you my whole history."

"What, another one!"

"Sit down again. You shall know all. Let's have one more glass."

We had one more glass each. Scotch whisky—hot.

"Ginger," he said, "I am in love."

"Bless my soul!"

"Madly, desperately in love, Ginger, with a fair and sunny creature of eighteen summers."

"And she reciprocates your passion?"

"She sip-sip-sipsikakes my passion."

Brown was growing a trifle incoherent. I thought it was coming on. He was of an excitable temperament, and took matters less coolly than I did.

"Who is she?"

"You will never divulge my secret?"

"Never."

"You swear it?"

"I swear!"

The landlord was out of the room, so I

swore most comfortably. He leaned forwards and whispered in my ear,

“McRashie’s daughter. Ha! ha!—the offspring of my hated chieftain. Tilda!”

“Good gracious! And what does McRashie say?”

“He sleeps on the brink of his peppers-pice—he knows nothing—we breathe not a syllable to him, or to the myrmidons by whom we are surrounded. Why I should get the sack at a moment’s notice.”

“Serve you right.”

“*What!*”

“From McRashie’s point of view, Mon-mon-gommery,” I said, reflectively, “I think it would serve you right.”

“From McRashie’s point of view,” he said, in his most withering manner again, “am I to measure my heart’s devotions from McRashie’s point of view? Would you, or I, or any of us?”

“Not any of us.”

"Just so—well, I love her, Ginger. I am going to die for her."

"Lord bless me—so bad as that?"

"We shall die—or fly."

"I should recommend you to fly."

"Ah! but we've nothing to fly with."

"No—ahem—feathers?"

"Well," he said, with a short laugh, as he took his last gulp of whisky, and chewed the bitter cud, or rind of the lemon, that had been at the bottom of the glass, "you may put it that way, if you like. No feathers—ha! ha!—to our nest. See?"

"See a nest—where?"

"Cus it, Ginger, you *are* dull. We've no ready money—and McRashie is a determined, iron-hearted man, oh, he is—just!"

"I see now."

"But, Ginger old fellow, she has *tin*, money, in her own right—it comes to her when she's twenty-one—from her father—five hundred pounds. A friend of mine

has read the will at Doctors Commons, and it's as right as ninepence."

"Ah!"

"So I only want a friend to stand by me for three years."

That last glass of whisky I should have been better without; I felt I could not stand by him for three minutes. I told him so, and he gave me his arm, and we walked towards my shop together. I don't remember any more of his story, though when we were out in the fresh air, he tells me, he poured the whole recital into my ears. There was a kind of buzzing in them which stopped the flow. I promised to be a friend to him and help him through thick and thin, especially through the thick. I was very fond of him then. If he had asked me for the recipe for the Golden Hair Renovator, I should have given it to him. He borrowed fifteen shillings, I can remember that, and I promised to go out with him for a stroll—just for a

stroll!—on the next day, Sunday; I did not remember *that* till he called in his best things and astonished Mrs. Kirkpatrick. That was tit for tat, for she astonished him that Saturday night when she opened the door and let me in, and found us both on the top step clinging to the bell-pull.

“Good evening, Mrs. Kirk—Ginger,” Montgomery had said, in his foolish and incoherent way, as if it were the right time of night to joke with my wife, or as if my wife were likely to see a joke at any time, “I trust you’ll excuse the lateness of the visit, but Ginger and I—we—that is—and, as I said before, good evening.”

“Teddy,” said Mrs. Kirkpatrick, in a voice of awful reproof, “where *have* you been?”

“Fox-er-geese with my friend Gosling.”

“Gommery!” said Brown.

“Gommery—Gosling—beg pardon.”

“Teddy,” said Mrs. Kirkpatrick, with a scream, “you’ve been a-drinking; and this

counter-jumping beast"—(she knew him then; she had seen him in the shop, and perhaps he had talked her into that cotton-print)—“has been a-drinking with you. You come in,” and in I went by the collar into the dark shop, “and *you*”—to Montgomery—“get out with your drunken carkis, do!” and bang went the street-door against the unoffending Brown.

I was hurt at this; I sat down in the chair we place in the shop for customers, and wept. “He is my old school-fellow—my dearest friend,” I told her, “and you’ve slammed the door of hospitality in his face.”

“I wish I’d shut his ugly nose in,” said Mrs. Kirkpatrick, vindictively.

“I——”

“Now, get to bed, and don’t sit there crying over the Bear’s Grease.”

So I went to bed and forgot my grief—and Brown.

I remembered all about Brown the next

day, with the exception of his promise to take me for a little stroll. I had quite forgotten that. But I couldn't get Brown out of my head, and, if I had tried ever so much, I am perfectly certain Mrs. Kirkpatrick would not have allowed it. She wanted to know a great deal concerning Brown—who he was, what he was, and where I'd picked him up. That is not a nice expression—"picked him up,"—is it?

It would be difficult to estimate the number of questions Mrs. Kirkpatrick put to me, but it was clearly evident she did not like Brown; she was "dead against him" at first sight, for Brown had not looked particularly pre-possessing last night with his head on one side, and his hat on one side, and himself on one side. I don't think a man ever looks his best in that style, except in oil-colours.

Well, Selina almost hated Brown. "To go sotting together, the two of you, in a bar-parler"—Selina always *will* say parler

—was disgraceful! What we had to talk about all the time, she couldn't think, but we were after no good, that was certain; and she only had my word for it that we *did* spend the evening like that. She shouldn't wonder, not she, if we were not up to some games somewhere, and that this was a paltry excuse. She supposed there was a barmaid or waitress, or some fast hussy or other at the "Fox and Goose," if she only knew the rights of it. Don't tell her that two men were going to *booze* for hours and talk of their school days—oh! no; she wasn't a child to be deceived in that way. If she was a little older than I, she had a wise head on her shoulders, and if she only caught me with anybody—if she only——*Rat-a-tat-a-tat-a-tat-a-tat-TAT!*

"Brown!" I gasped forth, when the noise of the summons had subsided.

"*What!*" shrieked Selina.

"I'm sure it's Brown—it's his knock," said I, meekly.

"How do you know it's his knock?" asked Mrs. Kirkpatrick, severely.

"I don't *know* it's his knock—I never heard him knock before in my life—but it sounds like Brown."

It was Brown; and to this day Selina Kirkpatrick is firmly convinced that it was all arranged between us.

Brown came in brisk and agile, and shook hands with me. He was certainly a man of great self-possession, for, undaunted by Mrs. Kirkpatrick's glassy stare, he seized her hand, and shook it violently also. When he had done shaking it, I was doubtful of the consequences, Mrs. K. being so very excitable. If Montgomery had suddenly received a "back-hander," I should not have been surprised, but his coolness carried the position.

"I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Kirkpatrick—you can't imagine how pleased I am to make your acquaintance," he said. "I heard so much about you last night;

we spent the evening talking of you."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," said Mrs. Kirkpatrick, ironically—"pity you couldn't get your talk over earlier."

"Madam," said Brown, with tears in his eyes, "we are companions of youth, and all that sort of thing. We were brothers—more than brothers—in our boyhood's days—weren't we, Ginger?"

I hardly knew how to reply, but I agreed with him that we were.

"And if the two of you——"

Brown here took the liberty of interrupting Mrs. K.

"One moment, my dear madam, one moment," he said, in his most insinuating manner, in a "What's the next little article" kind of way that was always effective in his business. "I have to confess we were somewhat overcome on the occasion of our meeting, and that poor Ginger would have had—well, perhaps a slight difficulty in finding his way home without

me. But this is not a customary weakness—oh, no! It is not my old schoolfellow's—pray accept the assurance that it is not mine. The man who——”

“Look here, what do you want with my Teddy?” asked Mrs. Kirkpatrick, abruptly.

Brown's eloquence had not impressed my better-half. Brown's appearance had; he was in his best things—a cut-away coat with a half-dozen flowers in his button-hole, a white waistcoat, with lappets that caught the eye, and made him look all waistcoat, and a blue satin necktie, relieved by brimstone-coloured lozenges. As for his jewellery—well, I hope he came by it honestly, for what with his watch-chain and locket, breast-pin, signet rings, and solitaires, there must have been about three-quarters of a pound of precious metal on him, or something that looked like precious metal at a distance.

“What do I want with Ginger?” said Montgomery.

"If you like to call him, and he likes to be called Ginger, yes."

"I promised I would go for a stroll with him this afternoon—just an hour's stroll in the Park—and here I am."

"Oh, yes, there you *am*," said Mrs. Kirkpatrick; and then she faced me with an expression that I did not like. "You never told me anything of this."

"It slipped my memory."

"Slipped your fiddlesticks! What do you want to stroll in the Park on Sunday afternoons for, I should like to know."

Now this was not kind before Brown. It wasn't a nice way; it was dictatorial and lowering—very lowering; it made me wild. In secret, in the bosom of the shop, I could have borne this kind of thing; but with the eye of society, the eye of Brown, in his best things, too, upon me, it would have been unmanlike to succumb.

"I thought the fresh air would do me good, Mrs. Kirkpatrick," I said, loftily;

"and, if you have any unnatural prejudice against fresh air, I am sorry for it. I am going out !"

"And joy go with you," said Mrs. K., flouncing from the room and slamming the door with a violence that "as near as a toucher" brought the shutters of the shop down into the street.

Brown shrugged his shoulders and grimaced across at me.

"What are you making those faces for?" I asked, for I was not easy in my mind.

"She's not fit for you, Ginger," he said, shaking his head. "I am frank, and must say so. I have always noticed that the wives of men of genius don't understand their husbands—it's the rule, Ginger—and there is genius in you, and no mistake."

"What makes you think so?"

"I have been reading your poem—on the bottles of the Renovator; there's the true ring in those bottles—I mean those verses."

"I am glad you like them ; I took a deal of pains with them. I say—am I quite smart enough for you to-day ?"

"Well," said Brown, "I—I think you'll do; but, if you had anything livelier than that black stock with the buckle and strap wagging over the collar behind, it wouldn't be amiss."

"I've a green satin upstairs—I was married in it; but—Mrs. K. is upstairs!"

"Ah! then, I wouldn't fetch it."

And I didn't. We went out of the premises quietly. Mrs. Kirkpatrick said afterwards that we sneaked out like a couple of thieves; but that is strong language. Still she saw us go, and she called to us from the first floor window, and half a dozen people in the street stopped to hear her injunctions.

"Don't you be late—don't you keep me waiting for my tea, or you'll hear of it again."

Now, there was a nice thing to shriek at

a man going out for a stroll. Of course everybody laughed. Montgomery laughed too, and a little boy called out—

“Way—oh! Give it him 'ot, missus; he ain't got no friends!”

Montgomery pressed my arm.

“That's just what he has got—eh, Ginger?”

“Got it hot?”

“No—got friends. Friends to stand by you.”

“Yes. I don't feel entirely alone.”

I walked up the High Street in a depressed condition of mind. I felt that I was out without leave in flat disobedience to orders. And I had been accustomed for years to rely on Mrs. Kirkpatrick. Brown's was a nature too strong for me; it was whirling me away. He was the turbid torrent, and I was the volatile straw.

When we were out of High Street and turning into Muddleborough Free Park, my spirits rose somewhat.

"What a beautiful day! What a lot of people!" I said.

"I should think so. All the beastly shops shut, thank goodness. Not that I want so many people about to-day. Oh! no—not at all."

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you presently. Look out, Ginger," he cried, "here's McRashie coming. I wouldn't have him see me for the world."

"Lor' bless us!"

"Get behind this tree; there's a good fellow."

I did so at his request, wondering if he had Mr. McRashie's jewellery on; but that was an unjust suspicion. The great linen-draper passed, with his head in the air, haughty and stern and puffy.

"The tyrant!" muttered Brown, shaking his fist after him; "but the hour will come to trample him in the dust."

"He will be your father-in-law some

day," I said, reprovingly; "don't trample him."

"Let him beware of that eventful hour."

"You should remember he is Tilda's parent," I added, still reprovingly.

"I shan't forget it. And, if he doesn't give me a clear half of the business, he won't forget it either. Now, come on."

"Where are we going, Montgomery?"

"Ay, there's the rub," he said, emphatically.

"Are we going anywhere in particular?" I asked.

"We are."

"Then——"

"Ginger, would you betray your best friend?"

"Never!"

"I have put my whole trust in you—the one secret of my life is yours."

"Thank you very much."

"*She* is at hand."

"Not—not——"

"Tilda? Yes, she will be there—all there!"

"Oh! but I say, this is not quite right."

"Right! This is the only chance that two fond hearts have of meeting—and 'love is lord of all,' Ginger."

"Yes, that's perfectly correct, I believe; but I wish you had not dragged me into this."

"You would not desert me?"

"No, no, certainly not; but am I not in the way?"

"That's just what you ain't," and here he digged me playfully in the ribs.

"How's that?"

"There's another of 'em, and you are to take care of *her*!"

"Lord have mercy upon us!—you don't say so!"

The cold perspiration into which I suddenly broke frightened him.

"It's all right, Ginger—don't be alarmed. Of course I don't mean any *larks*. I would

not lead you on to any *larks* for the world."

"Montgomery, you're very good."

"But—I'll tell you how it is. You see, Ginger, Miss McRashie's maiden aunt has suddenly turned up, to pay her brother-in-law a visit, and we can't meet while the aunt sticks like a barnacle to Tilda. And to-day is a crisis in my life."

"I'm sure it is in mine—if Mrs. Kirkpatrick hears of it!"

"Tilda and I have much to arrange—we have a plan of a secret marriage to settle—before Biles, the undertaker, thwarts us."

"Biles! What, the widower opposite McRashie's?"

"The filthy beast, yes! He's after Tilda."

"Poor Gom!"

"I heard the news this morning; but he must stride over my cold corpus to secure her. You see if he doesn't."

"I hope I shan't see that," I said.

"Events are marching onwards, Ginger, and the great blow must be struck."

"What, at Biles?"

"At anybody who thwarts me. I'd punch his head as soon as look at him."

"My brave Montgomery."

"I'd——"

"But about this aunt? What's to be done with her?"

"I'll tell you, Ginger. Listen. Miss Gogarty, Mrs. McRashie's half-sister by a second marriage——"

"Oh! never mind the relationship. Go on."

"Well, she's romantic—very romantic—and she sympathises with us. Not with old McRashie—she hates her brother-in-law like poison. She knows all. And she is out with Tilda this afternoon."

"I'm sorry for that."

"And we have told her, Tilda and I, that we are going to introduce her to a poet—a real poet from London. She's

'dead nuts' on poets. A friend of mine of considerable distinction in the literary world—ha! ha!—is to—keep her at a respectful distance from us—see?"

"Yes—but I don't like it," I said.

"Don't like being taken for a poet?" cried Montgomery. "Well, you are a fellow. Where's your ambition?"

"I don't like the idea at all. That's flat."

And it was not the only thing that was flat, I'm disposed to think now.

"It's just for once, Ginger—it shan't occur again."

"I'll take blessed good care it doesn't. Why, what would my wife say if——"

"Nobody's to know."

"I shall be seen—we shall all be seen—how is it to be helped, when three of us are as well known in Muddleborough as the town pump?"

"That's the plan. We're going out of Muddleborough."

"Eh?"

"There's a four-wheeler waiting for us at the 'Warrior's Head.' I have engaged it in your name for secrecy's sake. We drive out of the town, and a mile and a half on the road we pick up Tilda and her aunt."

I gazed open-mouthed at Brown. His strategic powers had robbed me utterly of speech.

"Then they get into the trap with us, and we go for a drive. A simple drive into the country. Where's the harm?"

"It's the look of the thing I object to, Montgomery."

"I fancied that yours was a soul above the petty judgments of this narrow world."

"So it is."

"I thought so—or why this noble air, and that buckle and strap sticking out behind?"

"Are they out now?"

"Yes," he said, tucking them in for me at once; "and now for the ladies. I shall never forget this kindness. I will do as much for you some day."

"Oh! no, you won't."

"In another way, of course. And here's the 'Warrior's Head,' and just before we go in let us settle up. Short reckonings make long friends—regular six-footers!"

He was full of spirits, but he made very bad jokes.

"How much do I owe you?" he asked.

"Fifteen shillings," said I.

"Lend me fifteen more, and that will make thirty bob," he said, playfully.

I lent him the money and he promised to pay me out of his next month's salary. But he didn't.

We found the trap waiting for us at the "Warrior's Head." It was a four-wheeled chaise, with a strange-looking yellow horse to draw it. A very tall horse, with pointed

ears, which were a source of attraction to all the flies in Muddleborough.

"I always drive this mare," said Brown, "there's mettle in her."

"What's she stamping about with her hind legs for? Isn't she comfortable?"

"She's anxious to be off. She pants for freedom under the bright blue dome of heaven, Ginger, as we do," he said, eloquently. "Jump up."

We jumped up. The ostler saw us out of the stable gates into the main road, along which we started at a dashing pace. There was no nonsense about that mare—she meant business—she knew she had a character to maintain, and she might have been anxious to prove it. Though she was scarcely an elegant animal to look at, she was a wonderfully good one to go—for slap—dash, we were out of Muddleborough into the country before we knew where we were. That horse was full of mettle!

"Can't you hold her in a bit?" I ventured to suggest, in a gentle manner.

"I'm trying—but I can't. We are going a little too fast, perhaps, ain't we?"

"I think so."

"How she pulls! Hold on a bit, too, with the reins, Ginger, will you?"

I did so, and then we both remarked that the mare was fresh.

"Not so fresh as you were last night, Ginger," said Brown, when the jolting of the vehicle allowed him to get his joke out.

The animal had "toned" down by this time, but there was an extraordinary amount of spurt in her still. She took everything as a personal affront, which must have rendered life somewhat of a burden to her. When we came to the turnpike, the collector's apron was an indignity which led the beast to back rapidly towards the ditch, and when the collector held out his hand for the money,

up went the mare on her hind legs and began sparring at him.

"Got her out again, then, Mr. Brown?" the toll-keeper said.

"Yes—she's out."

"Hope you'll get on better this afternoon."

"Thankee."

"What does he mean by getting on better?" I inquired, when we were off again.

"I don't know."

"Brown, you *do* know!"

"Somebody teased the horse last time, and it bolted for a little way. That's all."

"Is it likely to bolt for a little way, this time?"

"Stuff and nonsense! If I don't understand horses, who does?"

I couldn't answer this. It was too much of a conundrum.

"There isn't a horse that's my master, I

can tell you, Ginger. There isn't a—here they are."

"Where?"

"Standing by the stile—there's Tilda—she's waving her handkerchief at us. So's the aunt."

"They had better not do that," I remarked, for the mare was on her hind legs again, flaunting her hoofs as if in friendly recognition. "If they keep waving, I shall get down," I said.

But they left off, and we drove up to the ladies.

"Lor, Mr. Brown, is that you?" said Tilda, with surprise and a giggle.

Artful young woman was Tilda McRashie—a tall, thin, bony girl, with fuzzy light hair and a Gainsborough hat. And the aunt—well, one look at her was sufficient. I shall never forget her. I wished I had not come out with Brown now, very much. She was forty-five to begin with—she was very stout, and short, and was dressed

exactly like Tilda—Gainsborough hat and fluffy yellow hair as well. She was fluffier even than her niece. I was perfectly certain that both those girls had been at my Golden Hair Wash.

“Miss McRashie, I am delighted to see you, I am sure. This is, indeed, fortunate,” said Brown.

“I don’t see why it is fortunate—indeed I don’t,” said Tilda, pertly.

“If you and Miss Gogarty will so far honour us as to allow us the pleasure of driving you back to Muddleborough, we shall—really—esteem ourselves most fortunate and—*Wo!*”

The mare had caught the word Muddleborough, and was turning homewards. It was a most remarkable horse, full of intelligence, but impulsive.

“But you are going in the other direction, Mr. Brown. La! how silly you are!” said Tilda, with another laugh. Keen sense of humour, Tilda.

"If you ladies will deign to accompany us for a little drive before we turn," said Brown, with great effusiveness, "for a few minutes—if you only would!"

"Do you think pa would mind, aunt?" asked the innocent Tilda.

The aunt reflected.

"My dear, I don't like to advise. You know what your papa is—I shouldn't like to say."

"We have walked a long distance, and you are tired, aunt."

"Well, my dear, I am a little tired, but then——"

There was a conversation in a lower tone, a few more persuasive words from Mr. Brown, and then the ladies were assisted into the four-wheeler, Tilda by the side of Brown, and the aunt and myself on the back seat.

"You will permit me to introduce you to my friend, Mr. Pontifax, Miss Gogarty—Pontifax the poet."

"Cha-a-armed," said Miss Gogarty, with the sweetest and broadest smile, as she acknowledged the introduction and sat down.

She wedged me into a smaller compass than nature had intended I should be wedged at any time, and it became difficult to breathe. Brown's calling me by a false name helped to make my breath short too; he was full of surprises. I began to think I didn't care so much for Brown, after all; but it was pleasant to be called a poet, and considered a poet, though for a fleeting hour or two, at half-a-crown an hour.

"Make yourself agreeable to the old girl," whispered Brown to me. "I rely upon you."

"I—I'll try."

"Talk loud—she's a little deaf, and she won't hear us. Miss Gogarty, I hope you've plenty of room."

"Oh, yes, thank you," with another

blaze of smiles at Brown, "if I am not inconveniencing Mr. Pontifax."

Then she smiled at me, and I remembered that I was Pontifax.

"Not at all. I——"

"Hold on," cried Brown, "we're off now."

He said that after we *were* off, for the horse, with a mighty leap, had dashed into action in response to Brown's whip, and Miss Gogarty and I had knocked our heads together.

"Oh! good gracious!" and then Miss G. felt the Gainsborough hat and the back hair, and pronged me in the eye with the tips of her parasol, and took some time to recover the shock of the start. She gave me time for reflection, too, and to wonder why I was there, and where Mrs. Kirkpatrick was, and where the buckle and strap of my stock had gone; for they had burst out again, and were flourishing somewhere behind.

I talked to Miss Gogarty presently. I began to settle down to the position, and to make myself agreeable. This should never occur again under any circumstances whatever, but, as the present circumstances *had* occurred, it was philosophy to make the best of them. As we drove on gaily through the country, Brown talked "soft nothings" to Tilda, and I talked "hard nothings" to her aunt. I spoke of poetry, so did Miss Gogarty, and I found I was nowhere in the argument. She knew more about Keats and Shelley, and Jones and Tupper, and other gentlemen, than I knew about Golden Hair Wash ; she quoted reams of them ; she overwhelmed me with her knowledge ; she took me into her confidence, and confessed that she had written a great deal of verse herself, and that it was all in manuscript in her lodgings at Camden Town ; she quoted a few reams of that too, with her eyes in "a fine frenzy rolling." It began to dawn upon me that

Miss Gogarty was mad—not quietly mad, but raving—and that Brown and Tilda had been aware of this from the first.

Miss Gogarty talked to me of the delight of meeting a kindred soul, of the bond of sympathy naturally existent between two beings who could pour out their warmest feelings into verse, and I got a little frightened.

“And to think you can stand aloof from the world and devote your best energies to the Muses, Mr. Pontifax. How I envy you !”

“Yes, it’s—it’s very nice.”

“To think that the world cannot step between you and your aspirations and say, ‘This work shalt thou do before the sun sets, O slave.’”

Before sunset to-morrow, there was Mrs. Musselwhite’s wig to do up, but I did not tell her so ; it might have lowered me. Besides, I was far from certain that that old flaxen-fuzzy switch of Miss Gogarty’s

was of Nature's growth. It was not the exact shade of the front portion, and my wife had sold something like it last evening, when I was with Brown at the "Fox and Goose." Was I near a work of my own creation? How singular are the ways of Destiny!

"You are independent, Mr. Brown tells me," she said.

"Does he really?"

"I have a little competence of my own too," she said, with a heavy sigh; "but life is very lonely."

"Is it, ma'am?"

"I know no one of my own tastes and sentiments now. Oh! Mr. Pontifax, I am very lonely indeed," and here Miss Gogarty suddenly gushed over and cried copiously, with her white pocket-handkerchief crammed into her mouth to keep the sobs down.

"Aren't you well?" I asked, nervously.

"Hush! hush!—don't let them hear me; I am thinking of the past."

"If you'd only think of what a beautiful afternoon it is!"

"—Of the past when I was not lonely, before he went abroad and caught something which stuck to him. Oh! my poor Alonzo!"

Yes, I saw it all very clearly. This was too bad of Brown. Miss McRashie's aunt was a lunatic, and those two in front had constituted me her keeper whilst they "spooned." What should I do? Miss Gogarty had given way in earnest, and was resting her head on my shoulder. This materially interfered with the balance, as Miss Gogarty was heavy, and I had to hold on by her waist to keep myself in the chaise at all. Miss McRashie looked round and giggled dreadfully, then she nudged Brown who looked round too and roared with laughter.

“Bravo, Ponty, my boy, you are getting on famously !” said he.

“What do you mean by famously, sir?—what do you—oh, lor, Montgomery, look at the railway-station !”

“Mrs. Kirkpatrick, by Gosh !” cried Brown, whipping the mare violently, and turning her head with the rapidity of a penny boat at London Bridge.

But it was too late, we were discovered ; Mrs. Kirkpatrick, being of a suspicious turn of mind, had followed Brown and me to the “Warrior’s Head,” and afterwards taken the Sunday train from Muddleborough to the first station out—six miles run through a beautiful bit of country,—where she had, full of womanly instinct, but pitiful jealousy, waited for us in a BOILING mood. And then up we came, and round we went, and Mrs. Kirkpatrick saw, with an eagle’s glance, that my arm was encircling the waist of Miss Gogarty.

I have hinted before that an ill-framed

girlhood, combined with many years of her own way, had rendered Mrs. Kirkpatrick somewhat hasty, but I was not prepared for quite so much haste as she exhibited on this occasion; her feelings had been roused before our arrival, and, as we appeared in sight, they were let loose.

"Come out of that cart," she screamed like a fog-signal, "you base deceiver; how dare you behave like this!"

We had swung round by this time, and Mrs. Kirkpatrick was hanging on behind and hammering at me with her umbrella.

"My dear, I assure you it's all a mistake," I said, warding off the blows as well as I could; "it's not my fault, it's all—through Brown."

"Come out of that cart, you wicked monster—come out directly!"

"My dear woman, it's suicide to jump. Wait a mo-mo-mo-moment!"

We were going at full speed, but Mrs.

Kirkpatrick hung on behind, and ran with us like a lapwing.

"Stop the mare, Brown; there'll be murder done," I cried; but Gommery was deaf to my entreaties, or the act was impossible.

"Oh! Mr. Pontifax, who is this dreadful woman?" asked Miss Gogarty, white with alarm, and more clinging in her nature than ever.

"Who are you calling a woman, you brazen huzzy! I'll let you know what it is to sit there cuddling other people's husbands. Take that!"

That was her last blow for the dignity of the married estate. It was all done with the back of the umbrella. Smash, bash, scrape, and away came all the back-hair of Miss Gogarty on to the hook, and there was Mrs. Kirkpatrick in a sitting posture in the middle of the road, looking as furious as a red Indian with a scalp

trophy waving at the end of her war-hatchet.

"Let me out!" I cried; but the appeal was useless. A terrible yell from Miss Gogarty had precipitated the climax, and frightened the mare, and we were off at the rate of fifty miles an hour.

Talk of Johnny Gilpin's ride to Edmonton, or Tam O'Shanter, or the Bronze Horse, or anything suggestive of equine velocity—they were all nowhere! Mrs. Kirkpatrick disappeared from our sight; the hedges, ditches, trees seemed to race by as to an accompaniment of women's screams and Montgomery's bad words; something whirled past that might have been an aerolite, but which was Gommery's white hat; there was a tremendous bumping and swaying of the vehicle as we oscillated between the high-road and the footpath; there was a pig run over, and then Miss Gogarty and I, still clinging to

each other, ascended into space, and came down violently and indecorously in the middle of a blackberry hedge. We were very much shaken, we had burst a little in the tighter portions of our wardrobe, we had scratched our faces, but we had broken nothing of importance. Montgomery and Tilda were still careering at the old pace towards Muddleborough; it was a straight piece of road, and, when Miss Gogarty and I recovered our senses, there was the horse and chaise a speck in the distance, Montgomery pulling his hardest, and Tilda, with her arms round his neck, refusing to leave go, and hampering him dreadfully.

"They'll be smashed to pieces," said Miss Gogarty.

"Yes—I shouldn't wonder."

"What will her father say? Oh, Mr. Pontifax, why did you drag me into this?"

I did not answer her; my heart was too full for words, and I was anxious to get to Muddleborough.

"I can't go through the town like this," said the aunt, tetchily, "and I won't."

"What do you think of doing?"

"I shall stop at the next cottage, and you must send a conveyance for me. Look at my rags—look at my back-hair."

"I'll send anything you like; but you will allow me to respectfully suggest that my wife is rapidly advancing in the rear, and I cannot answer for the consequences."

"Oh! good gracious, let us get on. Oh! that dreadful woman. I wouldn't be overtaken for the world."

"It's as well not—to-day."

"And she *is* your wife?"

"Certainly she is."

Miss Gogarty gave me one last look of withering scorn, and hissed forth—

"Miscreant!"

"It was no fault of mine."

"It was a deeply-laid scheme to deceive me."

"I assure you it was all through Brown."

"I'll Brown him—when I get home."

"I would, ma'am; and, if you'll tell him from me——"

"Hold your tongue, sir."

And I did. I did not speak another word to Tilda's aunt—we had no more to say to each other—we walked all the way to Muddleborough in stony silence.

At the turnpike I asked for news.

"Have they gone through?"

"Oh! yes, they have gone through," growled an old woman in attendance, and "I'll have the law of the lot of you presently," roared forth the collector from the interior, where he was nursing a foot three times its natural size. Brown had driven over that. It was unintentional, but it had hurt just the same.

In the streets of Muddleborough there was turmoil. There was a crowd of men and boys waiting for us, to begin with.

"Here's the other two!—here's the rest of 'em!—hooray!" cried the boys.

“Where’s the old gal’s back hair gone?” some fiend in human shape screamed; and one sharp voice, that cut like a razor’s, said, “Why, it’s the hornimental barber. I’ll tell your wife, you waggybone!”

The crowd thickened as we walked on. There were bits of the chaise in the high-road; there was the red letter-box at the corner of the street all askew, and there was a plate-glass window broken at the tobacconist’s, but that was a judgment upon him for opening on Sundays. Lastly, thank Heaven, there was McRashie’s, No. 200, and a large portion of the townsfolk staring up at the premises as though they were on fire. Two police constables and McRashie himself were on the doorstep. Miss Gogarty thought it advisable to faint, and was carried in. I should have been glad to faint too, but did not see clearly how to manage it.

“Has Brown come home?” I asked, faintly.

"He has come home—on a shutter," said Mr. McRashie, sternly.

"Not dead?"

"No ; cracked."

"And Miss McRashie?"

"She's as right, sir, as fits will allow her to be; but," he shouted, "what the devil's business, sir, is that of yours? How dare you, sir, a married man of your years, encourage this sort of thing—how—how—I'll have you drummed out of the town along with that scamp Brown, see if I don't!"

"Shall we put him under the pump, guv'nor," asked a dirty-faced brute at my elbow.

"No, no bloodshed," said McRashie. "Leave the wretch alone. He'll hear more of this presently."

I heard a great deal more of it from Mrs. Kirkpatrick that very evening. I have heard a great deal of it since. The

wife of my bosom has never believed the story, and refuses to let me go out of doors till the shop's shut, and she can come with me. I have a very bad name in the town, my moral friends look askance at me, the trade has gone down, the Golden Showery Flowery Hair Renovator is not what it was, and all the respectable folk have their hair cut at Clipper's in the next street. There has been an action for damages from the tobacconist, another from the "Warrior's Head" for the horse (the horse hasn't been well since), a claim from Farmer Brown for killing his sow, which he had been four months fattening for the London market, a demand from the Government authorities for damage done to the letter-box, a summons from the police for furious driving, and a call from the toll-collector for medical attendance. And it was all through Brown, who left Muddleborough without paying his share of the expenses. He never married Matilda McRashie. She

gave him up, and accepted Biles, the undertaker, a man in a good way of business, and likely to get the next burial contract from the parish. Brown wouldn't have made her a good husband, and she's well out of it!

SHRINK'S ISLAND.

SHRINK'S ISLAND.

HOW many years ago is it since John Simmonds and I went fortune-hunting to New Zealand—since John Simmonds died of fever in the passage out, and I stepped on stranger's land with a heap of baffled hopes for luggage? A great many years ago, for my hair is very white now, and the hand that pens these lines is terribly unsteady. I was not a young man when I made that weary journey, neither was John Simmonds; we had both seen forty summers, were both men of the world—rolling-stones, who, having gathered no

moss in our native land, made sure of finding all the moss across the sea; and, with the restless fever on us, started off to "settle down."

John and I had been rolling-stones all our lives—poor devils who had never known what luck was, and were drawing blanks from the great lottery whilst other men got rich. We had shared cribs together at Ponder's Institution; we had worked together as carpenter's apprentices; we had knocked about town together, and fallen in love with the same girl (who had jilted us both); we had parted once or twice in "huffs," and met again in manners the most odd—fate being resolved to cross our lives, and keep John in sight of me and me of John.

Simmonds and I had been apart two years, when we met in a dark little street near the Docks. I had been seeking a situation at a ship chandler's, and John was returning from a sight of the *Saucy Sarah*, a

sailing vessel, in which he had booked his passage to New Zealand. John and I, over our glasses of grog at the "Hope and Anchor," forgot all grievances, and remembered past associations, and were soon shaking hands and laughing, till the tears ran down our cheeks into the rum and water.

Well, it ended after the old fashion; John and I became sworn friends once more, and I was ready to try the new land with him, and begin life afresh to-morrow. There were fortunes to be made across the sea, he was sure, and in London there was only hard work, with hard pay, and hard masters. Both of us had fared ill in merry England, and there were no claims strong enough to bind us to it. Waifs from Ponder's Institution, where the loss of father and mother at an early age had rendered us eligible as pupils; with a married sister or two, whose surly husbands did not care to see us, and with an old aunt on my side,

out of her mind, and an old uncle on John's, out of elbows and in the workhouse, things were not particularly conducive to our stay. So away we went, and in the crowd of faces that looked after the *Saucy Sarah*, there was not one that John or I had any cause to say, "God bless!"

Still we went away in good spirits; there were hopes that affairs would take a turn now, and that we should be wealthy merchants some of these fine days. John had letters of recommendation which were to work wonders. John knew a friend out there, who had started in life as poorly off as himself, and had become an influential tradesman, with more money than he knew what to do with—happy fellow!—and who was to give us work directly we reached him, and launch us on strange waters bravely. All was as it should be to our sanguine natures, and it would be our turn to be uppermost as the wheel went round.

Well, John Simmonds sickened on the passage out, and died. So much for castle building and stray ventures, and looking forward to the day that never comes; and so an end to all John's hopes in the deep waters wherein they let him sink.

Two years and a half ago I should have shaken my head, said "poor old Jack," and set to work again, had anyone met me with the news of John Simmonds's decease; but it was a different thing in that sailing vessel, after we had sworn true fellowship again. When they dropped him into the sea I gave up like a child, and cried as if my heart would break; and a month after I woke up to find myself still aboard ship, and to receive the congratulations of my fellow-passengers on having slipped the clutch of death at last, and beaten back the fever that had settled poor John Simmonds.

It was a long passage, and I thought New Zealand never would be reached. A

dreadful passage, with storms that drove us back ; and frightful calms that kept us stationary for days ; and winds that tore the sails away, and blew one unhappy wretch overboard—to keep John company, perhaps. John was always fond of company ; too much company in bar-parlours after his day's work had been the ruin of John's prospects, people said, though I don't believe a word of it.

There was plenty of time to collect John's scanty wardrobe, and search for those letters of recommendation which never came across me ; they had been even myths in John's fecund imagination, or had been lost during his illness and my own, for no letters came to light, and the name and address of the friend who was to put us in the way of fortune-making I had utterly forgotten—they have slipped my memory to this day. What became of John's money, too—there were twelve pounds, I could swear to—I was unable to ascertain, but it was missing

also, and everyone on board was as innocent as heaven.

The *Saucy Sarah* reached New Zealand at last, and the new world lay before me where to choose. The passengers went east and west without so much as a good-bye; and I, friendless and alone, with no hand to grasp my own after that long journey—how I yearned for only one!—looked round for something to save me from starvation. I did not find work difficult to procure, but it was rough work, and I had never been one of the strongest. Then there were old habits to stand in my way—a trick of never keeping time was one, and a knack of dozing at mid-day was another; and there was the climate too hot for me, and no John Simmonds to keep my spirits up when they dropped suddenly to zero. I found New Zealand harder to live in than England; men of energy might rise there, but I had been inclined to give up, all my life. Energy was the one thing I had al-

ways lacked. It had happened, so let it be; call it destiny, or fate, or preordination, and then sit down by the way-side with crossed arms, and let the busy world pass by.

I was thinking of giving up for good, and following John Simmonds, when a letter from my sister (my youngest sister, who had been my favourite at home, and had taken kindly to me in after-life, when her own troubles were not few, and her husband had turned out a brute) brought me welcome news. Yes, there is no disguising the fact—welcome news it was to hear that my aunt, who had been out of her mind so long, had gone suddenly and will-less out of the world, and that her nephews and nieces were her next of kin. Eighty pounds a-piece at least—money enough to open a little shop in London, and make my fortune after all! On the strength of my sister's letter, I contrived to obtain a place in a little vessel bound Londonwards, and away I sailed one

bright morning in the month of August. The ship which bore me from New Zealand was the smallest craft, I believe, that had ever made the journey; and the skipper, Abel Shrink, the smallest man that had ever had command of a cockleshell on the high seas. Whether he had been made for the ship, or the ship for him, was a matter of uncertainty; but they matched each other admirably well—were both old and creaky in the joints, and black with tar. There was a very small crew—I don't think a dozen altogether—to the *Naiad*, as the ship was called, and I was the only passenger on board. The *Naiad* traded in a variety of goods, and made no boast of its accommodation for passengers, which was a frank and open statement, and deceived nobody. Skipper Shrink did not lay himself out for passengers, but I was anxious to reach home, and Shrink never turned away a sixpence.

I cannot say that I saved time by starting in the *Naiad*, or that we began the journey pleasantly. The skipper was a bad-tempered man, and the *Naiad* was a bad-tempered ship, which did not stand nice about answering to the helm. When it was fine weather there was no hope of making way; and when it was rough there was every probability of going to the bottom. I began to wish I had waited for the next ship, and started homewards in a decent fashion; I began to doubt getting home at all, and I grew particularly distrustful of the skipper.

Not having long had the pleasure of that gentleman's acquaintance, there was nothing remarkable, perhaps, in being puzzled with him; but when the crew began to grow doubtful of the skipper's movements, and the sailors to mutter "darnnation" on their eyes and limbs if they could make him out, it was time to grow curious and doubtful.

Possessing no knowledge of navigation, I was perfectly content for a time with the consciousness of the ship's progress; but when, after four or five weeks' sail, one man swore we had been exactly in the same latitude three weeks ago, my misgivings concerning Skipper Shrink's sanity began to strengthen rapidly.

Yet he was always cool and collected enough, gave his orders briskly, and swore at those who did not attend to them in an easy, business-kind of manner, that was seamanlike and sane. The mate alone made no remark, hinted that the captain knew perfectly well what he was about, and that if people only attended to their own business, people would get on better—much!

Having more time on my hands than the crew—though what they did to occupy their minds, save pulling at the end of a rope now and then, was doubtful—I set myself the task of keeping a quiet look-out on Skipper

Shrink. I accustomed myself to read on deck, and Shrink, who had long since set me down as a milksop, took little notice of me. I observed that he was always busy with a telescope; that every spare moment of his time he was standing on a coil of rope, or on a pail turned bottom upwards on deck, or else curled up in the rigging, looking out to sea with great intentness. Sometimes he would exchange a few words with the mate, a black-bearded, Blueskin kind of individual, I had never taken kindly to; but in most cases he prosecuted his studies alone, looking through his telescope, or drawing extraordinary diagrams on the palm of his hand with a bit of chalk, and licking them carefully out again when they did not seem to please him. So weeks went on at this game, and the ship, as I learned afterwards, wobbled about the high seas in a very eccentric fashion, and went every way but the right.

The secret oozed out at last in an odd manner. We had been two months away from New Zealand, and I was still reflecting on the littleness of humanity, compared with the immensity of sea and sky which shut us in between them, a speck to be blotted out at any instant, and nobody the wiser. It was mid-day, and I had been indulging in one of my customary naps, when the harsh voice of Skipper Shrink woke me with a start.

"By the Lud, there's one at last, Marks! By the Lud, we've got it! Take the bearings—hold the glass—look at the compass—by the Lud, our fortune's made!"

"Hush!" cried Marks, looking quickly round.

I had presence of mind to shut my eyes again, and snore on peacefully.

"It's all right," said Shrink, in a husky whisper, "he's sound asleep; he always

goes to sleep about this time, the fool!
Bang in the sun, too, blister him!"

He ran to the binnacle, pored over it for some time, scrawled out some hieroglyphics in a dog's-eared note-book, sprang at Marks, snatched the telescope from his hands, danced frantically about the deck, ran to the hold and listened, and came back to Marks again, laughing, and snapping all his fingers.

"Sixty thousand pounds, Marks—nearly a hundred thousand, perhaps—you and I gentlemen for life, when we come back this way again! A real seal island! I can see them flopping about like mad, hundreds of seals. And there they'll be till we fetch them, and weigh all the heavier, and increase their blessed families, and their blessed blubber, and all for you and me, Marks."

"Ah!" said Marks, drawing a deep breath, and rubbing one hand over the other.

"Old Bones made his fortune this way,

Marks; he took the latitude and longitude quietly as we might, did his voyage, and came back with everything suitable, and made heaps of money, and we're as lucky as Bones, and that's Shrink's Island, by gosh!"

"The less said about it the better, now," growled Marks, who was of a taciturn nature, and able to master his emotions.

"You're right, Marks; you're always right. Mum's the word."

Two of the men came on deck at this juncture; the skipper and the mate separated, and a few minutes afterwards Shrink was ordering all sail up, and, taking advantage of a stiff breeze, away we scudded, and soon left the seal island many miles behind us.

Time passed by, and there was no more idling; Shrink cursed every slackness of wind, and every intensity of wind that blew us the wrong way, and prayed for fine weather and a quick journey, like an angel,

as he wasn't. Time upset one man's calculations, too, very strangely. Marks was taken ill, and died. A queer illness, with lots of queer pains, that made me rather suspicious of foul play from Shrink. Still Shrink was very much cut up at his loss, and perhaps I am doing the man an injustice in that respect, remembering all which happened afterwards. So Marks was sewed up in canvas and pitched overboard, and the fate of him and his hopes strongly reminded me of John Simmonds, as he sank in the deep water, and Shrink read the burial service over him, and cursed all the hard words that came uppermost.

We had been three months at sea, and I had addled my brains by thinking of the skipper's luck, and how some men came to grief, and others to seal-islands. Pondering on this topic one breezy morning, when the ship was suffering from staggers, I confronted the skipper deep in calculation. Shrink had the advantage of me in the

matter of sea legs, and I was compelled to hang by ropes, and hold by the side of the vessel, to keep on my feet at all. Consequently, as I slowly made my way along the deck, I might have presented rather a skulking appearance, had the skipper glanced in my direction. But Shrink had his notebook open, and his hands full of papers, which the wind rustled and blew about; his hat was wedged over his forehead, the ship was lurching frightfully, the salt water was splashing over the deck, and he had several things upon his mind which kept his thoughts distracted. Now and then I observed that he crumpled the papers in one hand, and scrawled on them as well as he could with a lead pencil, that he swore occasionally, and stamped with his feet, and once burst into a screeching laugh of triumph, which curdled every drop of blood in my body. I might have been watching him, and yet I was thinking of my own ill-luck, and my sister in England, and had no

was; for there was little of the hero in me.

"You've seen the figures!"

"I certainly saw some figures; a string of figures. What of that?"

"Nothing," he grunted, thrusting the paper into his trousers' pocket, wheeling round, and scuttling off after the rest, threatening to split my fool's head open, if I moved. Recovering the majority of his papers, he returned to my side with almost a bland expression of countenance. "A man's a bit rough when he's riled," said he, half apologetically, "and you mustn't mind a few hard words. The papers are worth nothing—only old washing bills, but they might have been bank-notes for that matter. I didn't know at the moment, o'course. You couldn't ha' read the figures in the time, if they *had* been worth anything, eh?"

"Not very likely."

Shrink walked away relieved in mind, and I was left to mutter to myself *Lat. 12 deg. 4 min. 17 sec. N. Long. 97 deg.*

37 min. 30 sec. *E.* Still the skipper had his suspicions of me; they could not be shaken off by a man who was born suspicious of his mother, and who would possibly die distrustful of the doctor. The way that man dogged me about, and harassed me to death with questions, and put one or two of the figures to me suddenly, in an attempt to throw me off my guard, was trying to my nerves. I knew Shrink was doubtful of me, and knowing more myself than he perhaps gave me credit for, I felt rather insecure on the high seas beneath his murderous glances. I took the trouble to load an old pistol of mine, and sleep with it under my pillow, in the ragged old hammock, where every night I fought so hard for sleep. I felt I was in danger, and that unawares, some day or night, Skipper Shrink might make an end of me. I thought of Marks, and the sudden manner in which he had taken leave of society, and I was very careful of my food and drink, and made advances to the crew,

and offered wondrous treats in rum when the journey was over, and my native land was under my feet. I only wanted to reach home; I did not care for seal islands, or believe in their existence; I would be content with the little shop, and the eighty golden pounds which were to set me up in life. Shrink was a great visionary; let him be even the most practical of men, his business was not my business, and I had no right to interfere with it.

How well I remember the night I thought of this most, and lay in my hammock tossing from one side to another, till I tossed my brains into confusion, and confounded things most hopelessly! How the seal island mixed itself with home matters, and Shrink was married to my sister, and selling seal-skin jackets in Seven Dials, and how *Lat. 12 deg. 4 min. 17 sec. N. Long. 97 deg. 37 min. 30 sec. E.*, was printed up over his shop front, and lo, suddenly, was pricked into my flesh with red hot needles,

and rubbed in with gunpowder by the skipper's sooty hand. Was it dreaming or waking, or losing one's senses that awful night, which has never slipped my memory like things of lesser moment or of later date.

Surely it was something more than chance that woke me with a start at three o'clock in the morning, and set me bolt upright in my hammock, staring into the darkness before me ; set me listening for unusual noises too, and fancying I could detect them—strange, rustling noises to the right, where an old seaman's chest and some coils of rope were stowed. An odd dream, with the tingling sensation of the tattooing experienced therein so preternaturally acute, that I passed my hands to my side, and then to my arm to make quite sure that the latitude and longitude of the seal island were not ingrained there. What a heat I was in, to be sure ! how strange that was also, for the night was cold, and I had gone shivering to

bed three hours since. Then an awful thought made me fall back in my hammock, and clutch both hands to my heart to stay its leaping. My brain was disturbed by the dream, and this weakness was unaccountable, unless—I touched my side again, then my arm—good God, I was bleeding to death! I felt sure of that now by my faintness, by the slow current of life-blood from my side; some important vein, perhaps more than one, had burst, *or been opened!*

Yes, opened, I felt sure now, in a systematic manner, and by one not wholly unskilled in surgery. I should be a dead man in a few minutes, perhaps—if I could only find the spot from which my life was ebbing! I tried to compose myself, to keep cool, till some one could come to my assistance. I called for help, and then shuddered with horror at the feeble tones of my own voice. I sat up, and listened again to the creaking of the ship, and the

soughing of the wind amidst the rigging, then I turned my eyes again towards the dark corner beneath me, where I feared somebody was still lurking, waiting for my death to steal away. Oh, for a light! my heritage of eighty pounds for one half inch of a guttering candle. Oh! for the tread of the watch overhead, that I might be sure some one was near to help me. I called again, then listened. Was it fancy, or was there a rustling to the left where the seaman's chest stood?

"Who's there? Speak, or I shall fire."

I had drawn with difficulty the old pistol from beneath the pillow, and was peering over my hammock into the density beneath. It was a happy thought that pistol—if I could pull the trigger, and if the pistol would go off when the trigger *was* pulled, the report might bring the crew to my assistance. I would fire at the chest; if no one was there, there was no

harm done, and if some one were concealed, he was my murderer.

"Speak, or I fire. Who's there?"

My hand trembled very much, and my life was drifting away so rapidly that there was little time to lose. No answer. I pulled the trigger, and the sharp click of the lock was the only result. What a struggle it was to cock the pistol again; I had never worked so hard in my life! Once again I would give a chance to my shadowy enemy in the corner.

"Who's there?"

No answer; and with my remaining strength I pulled the trigger again. There was a quick flash, a loud report, followed by a heavy fall across the chest, and then a scuffling of feet overhead, and the crew tumbling rapidly down the ladder, one holding aloft a lantern.

"What's the matter? Who fired? Who's hurt?"

"Something to stop this blood," I gasped,

"I've been murdered—see to the man across the chest. Who is he?"

"The skipper, by all that's holy!" exclaimed the man with the light.

"Is—he—dead?"

Before an answer was returned, I had fainted away.

When I recovered consciousness, I found myself tightly bandaged, and a rough nurse of a sailor keeping watch at my side.

"Belay there! we've stopped the blood; ye'll do, if you keep quiet."

"And the skipper?"

"All about him arterwards; there's time enough."

And in good time I learnt that Skipper Shrink lived but half an hour after I had shot at him from the hammock. They had picked him up with a lancet in his hand, and carried him to his little cabin. He was dying when they took him down his cabin stairs, but he made signs for water, and

then for brandy, and sent the men away on those errands whilst he was lying in his berth. When they came back, he was dead. A note-book lay open at his side, and a piece of paper on which several figures had been written, was torn in half a dozen pieces, and left upon the quilt that covered him.

And those figures I have not remembered correctly to this day. Once in telling my story to the sailor who waited on me in my illness, and who served me well and kindly, I have sometimes fancied the true figures passed my lips, for I saw that man in his carriage three years since, and heard he had become suddenly rich, and that no one knew much about the means. Did he find Shrink's Island, I wonder? Perhaps so. Some men step into fortunes strangely, and some men are always going down the hill despite windfalls in the shape of eighty pounds, and the friendly hands stretched

out to help them on their journey. The journey has been long and hard with me, and I am old and grey. This is a tale of many years ago.

MY ULSTER.

MY ULSTER.

IT was of first-rate quality and unexceptionable cut. The very best extra superfine Irish Frieze—colours green and drab check, with red dots—price four guineas and a half. Altogether a stylish affair. Looking upon it as a whole, late one Saturday evening in January last, I considered it a masterpiece of workmanship, and a credit to Spinks, tailor, of our High Street, down in Worcestershire. It would have been four pounds five without the black velvet collar, but I never cared about expense. Spinks, a man with no artistic

taste, thought the black velvet collar was too decided a contrast—in fact, rather out of place in an Ulster; but I over-ruled his objections very quickly. He had his money—I received my coat—and there was an end to the bargain between us. It was not for a gentleman to argue with his tailor about light and shade—the fit of the thing was his business, nothing more.

My father, Josiah Doddles, of Fatsoil Grange, Worcestershire, thought it was a showy affair, and that I “had better kept to Chesterfields.” My mother, always gentle and maternal, was inclined to think that if it had fitted my figure closely—my slim and graceful figure had turned more hearts than one in Worcestershire, mamma said—it would have been more neat and elegant. But speaking with candour, yet reverence, they were good old-fashioned people, and my Ulster was not intended for the inappreciable eyes of country folk. No; there was a certain Lucy Fairback—a blue-

eyed, golden-haired, roguish, red-lipped Lucy—far away in London, in whose bright glances I intended to sun myself and my coat;—Lucy, the only beloved child of Felix Fairback, of the great firm of Fairback, Nipper, and Twist, Bedford Row. Lucy Fairback and I had plighted our troth seven weeks ago at the Nippers's ball—Mrs. Nipper, maternal relative of the second legal partner, an old lady with a small fortune and an enlarged liver, resident in Worcestershire. Vows had been whispered in the conservatory and registered in Heaven, and Papa Fairback's consent was to ratify the engagement which had been entered into between two gushing hearts.

So love and duty called me to London, Lucy, and the paternal Fairback; and one morning early in the new year, to London I went accordingly.

"Josiah," said my father, after he had given me his blessing at a retired corner of

the railway refreshment-counter, "this is the first time you ha' ventured to Loondon alone; take car' of yourself, there's a good lad."

"Trust me to take care of myself, father."

"Ah, if you were only a trifle more 'cute, Jo," was his last mournful observation, "I shouldn't feel so much afeard;" and with this extremely weak-minded remark, my father took me by the arm and saw me into a corner of the railway carriage with as much care as though I had been still the little boy he used to see off to boarding-school every Midsummer and Christmas.

I arrived safely in London at 8.30 P.M., and on the wings of love, and in a patent Hansom, my portmanteau, my Ulster, and myself were borne Bloomsbury Square way. The home of the Fairbacks was close to the business in Bedford Row, and Mr. Fairback was a business little man, passionately at-

tached to six and eightpences. The late Mrs. Fairback, Lucy, and Lucy's sisters combined, had never been able, by fair or foul means, to cajole Mr. Fairback into a country house. Mr. Fairback was no lover of "ruralities;" he was a nervous man, too, with a horror of thieves and dark country lanes after sundown. Mr. Fairback felt himself secure in the heart of London, with a patent lock on his door, and within a stone's throw of his office. He had never been robbed in Bloomsbury. The feet of the despoiler had never crossed the threshold of his home—no, never!

My nervous haste to throw myself at the feet of Papa Fairback, and implore his consent to his bestowal upon me of the hand and heart of Lucy, eldest but one of a family of eleven daughters, gave rise to a little uneasiness to begin with. Arriving in Bloomsbury with a large portmanteau, which was left in the hall along with my

hat and Ulster, suggested to the startled mind of paterfamilias an intention of staying several weeks with him, whereas I had intended, in the first instance, a mere formal call of a few minutes previous to retiring to my hotel. The acute reader may think that the wiser course would have been to seek my hotel in the first place, and wait patiently till the following morning; and the reader is possibly right. Had I done so, however, he would not have found a Doddles rushing into print in this uncere- monious manner. Had I done so, Fate would not have disgraced a spotless name, and covered it with ignominy. But I was young, and impulsive, and heedless;— anxious to end a terrible state of uncer- tainty, even at that hour of the evening, and experience the blissful sensation of call- ing Lucy mine! I was a stranger in Lon- don, too, and Papa Fairback might know of a respectable hotel, where I should not be imposed upon; might—ecstatic Heaven! it

was just possible—offer me a bed beneath the roof that sheltered the blue-eyed, golden-haired, roguish, red-lipped Lucy of my love-dreams.

Papa Fairback knew nothing of hotels, and had not the slightest intention of offering me a shelter from the wiles of a wicked world. He received me with kindness—a formal and stiff-backed sort of kindness—but still genuine. There was a father's heart beating beneath his frilled and snuffy cambric; I was the only son of *my* father,—and he had eleven daughters. It is doubtful if I should have had the courage to break the ice in the first meeting, had it not been for his kind assistance. He drew me out, relieved me of the burden of confession, accepted me as his son-in-law, shook me heartily by the hand, and, in his absence of mind, nearly charged me thirteen and fourpence for the interview.

I was doomed not to see Lucy that evening. In the delicious expectation of sur-

prising her in Budge Street by my presence, I had forestalled matters by a day, and arrived in town twenty-four hours before Lucy was prepared to receive me. Lucy, at the early hour of eight in the evening, had gone to bed with a nervous headache, and I, *preux chevalier*, would not hear of her being disturbed on my account. Mr. Fairback shook me by the hand again; he was glad to see that I was not a selfish man. Papa Fairback was offering me an invitation to dine with him and family to-morrow, and I was gracefully accepting the same, previous to shaking hands for the fourth time and wishing him good night, when a low tap-tap sounded on the panels of the door.

"Come in," said Mr. Fairback; and a scared maid-servant, with her eyes distended, came in, or rather tumbled in, at the summons.

"Oh! Lud, Mr. Fairback—oh! mussy

on us, Mr. Fairback—it never happened before !”

“What never happened before?” exclaimed Mr. Fairback, turning pale.

“The lock to be picked, sir, by the thieves, sir, and all the things in the hall, sir, to be taken away, sir !—oh, good Lud, sir !”

“All the things in the hall to be taken away !” Gracious goodness ! my portman-teau, my hat, and my Ulster were in the hall—*had been* in the hall, at least !

Mr. Fairback sank back into his easy-chair in an apoplectic attitude, then suddenly bounded up again whilst I was bending over him solicitously, took me off my guard, and came like a cannon-ball between my eyes.

“Good Lord ! to think of this misfortune to the house of Fairback—robbed at nine in the evening—a house in Bloomsbury, too ! Where’s my hat ? I’ll go round to the police-station.”

"You must allow me to accompany you."

"My dear sir, no ; the disgrace is mine, the trouble alone is mine. Come with me to the drawing-room—let me leave you to my daughters' care till my return. God bless me—robbed !"

Papa Fairback passed his arm through mine and trotted me into the drawing-room ; he introduced me to those of his daughters whom I had not seen before, and who had not accompanied Lucy down to Worcestershire seven weeks ago. He made an apology for retiring, and left me with the ladies ; only for a moment, however, for he suddenly bounced into the room again with a pencil and paper in his hands, crying—

"My dear sir, what has been lost of yours ? A portmanteau, my servant tells me—what kind of portmanteau?—oh, dear ! oh, dear !"

"A black leather portmanteau, buff straps."

"What was in it? As many articles as you can possibly remember, Mr. Doddles, please."

I blushed. There were a great many articles, under garments of various kinds, that my modesty would not allow me to detail in the presence of the Misses Fairback, and I stammered out a wish to reflect upon the matter. I had really not had time to consider the contents, but everything was marked "*J. Doddles*," in German text. I would make a complete list out in the morning.

"Hat, of course?"

"Yes—a hat."

"Any great-coat?" inquired Mr. Fairback, giving little jumps from one leg to the other, in his excitement.

"An Ulster."

"What colour?—dear, dear, dear, what colour?"

“Green and drab check, with red dots, and black velvet collar.”

“Black velvet collar?”

I responded in the affirmative.

“God bless me! I should think that *that* would be identified,” remarked Mr. Fairback, as he hurried from the room, and left me to protect, or to the protection of, his daughters.

Stranger though I was to the majority of the Misses Fairback, we were not at a loss for a topic of conversation that particular evening. I was soon at my ease with the fair sisters of my Lucy; they were all dear girls, and expressed much sympathy and solicitude. Even the portrait of a fat old lady over the piano—the late Mrs. F.—seemed to regret my loss with a mournful smile. Mr. Fairback, still in a state of great excitement, returned in due course. He had been to the police-station; the articles stolen would be stopped at all the pawnbrokers;

the inspector would thank me for as correct a list of the portmanteau's contents as my memory would allow; and the official opinion was, that it was a very barefaced robbery. I took leave of my future father-in-law at an early hour, in one of the paternal hats, which only found its level on the bridge of my nose. I promised to call at an early hour in the morning, and I went my way in search of an hotel, with a heart somewhat sadder than—considering Lucy—ought to have been the case.

It is a true adage, that “one trouble never comes alone”—it is a sad and melancholy fact. Standing in the Strand, with one hand in my trousers' pocket and the other keeping my hat up, a horrid heart-sinking truth struck at me like a knife. I had five shillings and a threepenny-piece in my pocket—only five and threepence, and the key of my lost portmanteau! My purse had been carefully packed in the inner

pocket of my valise ; I had heard strange tales of pickpockets in the London streets, and one could not be too careful, mother had said.

I leaned my coatless form against a lamp-post and took grave counsel with myself. Cast upon the London streets with five and threepence in my pockets, what was to become of me? Pride would not allow me to return to Budge Street and borrow money of Papa Fairback, whose accursed faulty door-lock had brought me to this awful pass—there were no friends of mine in London—and two days, at least, must elapse before a remittance could arrive from Worcestershire. The pawnbrokers were shut, and I could not even pledge my watch or breast-pin. Five and threepence ! The doors of every respectable hotel were closed against a man without luggage, and in cheap apartments down a lonely street, I might get my throat cut and

nobody the wiser. "London was an awful place," they said in Worcestershire—and they were quite right. In one hour I had lost my money, my portmanteau, my hat, and my Ulster! I would not lose my life—better to walk about all night under the big castor of Mr. Fairback.

Then came the horrible sensation of standing still in a morning suit and shivering against a lamp-post, followed by the acutest pangs of hunger. What should I do? There was a man promenading to and fro with a transparency on his head, recommending people to "Bevans's," and I had heard of "Bevans's" from fast young Worcestershire blades, who had been to London and seen life. I was becoming reckless; I would proceed to "Bevans's" forthwith; there was a friendliness about the name that encouraged me; I should get a chop there, and I should hear some fun, perhaps; I wanted cheering up a bit.

The fun had not begun at "Bevans's," when I had surmounted all the difficulties of finding my way thither. "Bevans's" was waiting for the theatres to close, and the music-halls to turn their gas out. I wiled away the time with a chop and sundry glasses of pale ale, and in writing a letter to Worcester, till the fun set in, and very dreary fun it was to my thinking; though the knowing ones nearly killed themselves with laughing. Perhaps reminiscences of my lost property—or thoughts of Lucy, who, in her innocent slumbers, little dreamed of the profligate night I was spending—or, perhaps, that last glass of Bass affected my spirits; for I sat glum and reserved in a corner—a Timon of Athens, without his Ulster coat.

Ulster coat!—strange, marvellous coincidence!—reality following on thought and rousing me to action. At the door was the Ulster—my Ulster!—I could swear to

it anywhere. Colour green and drab check, with red spots, buttons the patent of Spinks, tailor of Worcestershire—but where was the velvet collar? Trembling with agitation, I rose and tottered towards the door, passing close to the stranger in the coat—a tall, moustached stranger, with sharp eyes that regarded me for a moment as I passed him. It must be the coat. When immediately behind him, I gazed with a lynx-like gaze at the back of his neck. I had him. *The black velvet collar was turned in!*

I am an impulsive being, I have said; I caught the stranger by the arm.

“Excuse me, sir,” I said, in a husky whisper, “but this is *my* coat.”

“Sir!”

The stranger drew himself up very erect and firm, but circumstantial evidence was too strong for him.

“It’s no good sirring me—I’ll swear to

it. You took it from the hall of Mr. Fairback, in Budge Street, Bloomsbury Square. I know the buttons and the collar—I can show you my private mark inside the pocket—I——”

“Just step with me into the street,” said the man; “there’s no occasion to make a noise here. Will you come into the street?”

“I shall give you in charge.”

“Of course—of course—if you can prove it. Do you think a man would be mad enough in these times to walk about the streets in a coat he had just stolen? Sheer nonsense.”

We went into the street, my hand taking a firm grip of the sleeve, lest the robber should escape me.

“You are aware that you are open to an action, if you give me in charge?” was the stranger’s next observation.

“Possibly.”

“And that any jury in the world would bring me in enormous damages?”

“What have you done with the portman-teau, you barefaced scoundrel?”

“I don’t know anything about a portman-teau. Look here, now ; I’ll prove that half an hour ago I——”

God bless my soul ! where was I ?—what had happened ? A sudden blow in the pit of my stomach—a concussion on the nose—the houses over the way and the lamps down the streets all revolving rapidly—a figure vanishing round the corner—my helpless form doubled up against a wall, and my fingers instinctively clutching the Ulster out of which the miscreant had suddenly slipped ! That was the position.

It was like a dream ; only the pain was too vivid, and the swimming in my head and swelling of my nose too natural. Like a wild dream to lose my coat, and chance upon the thief within a few short hours—

one of those remarkable coincidences which occur once or twice in a life and which our friends never will believe.

I gave one feeble cry of "Stop thief!" followed by a hasty plunge to the next corner. All was dark and solitary, and no trace of the robber; nothing was left me but resignation. I put on my coat, and walked slowly up the street towards the Strand. I had learnt a lesson since Worcestershire was left behind that morning, and—I had found the coat again.

I turned thoughtfully into the Strand, pondering as to the next step of Josiah Doddles, junior. I was better off as to wearing apparel, but still as poorly situated with regard to pocket money—the world lay before me where to choose. Supposing I were to enter an hotel, say nothing about my capital in hand, and let the bill run on for a couple of days, for instance—hotel-keepers never expected money down. But,

then, a man without luggage *is* under suspicion at once. Supposing I——

“So here you are, my fine fellow, are you?”

I looked up, as an unpleasant set of knuckles fastened themselves between my collar and my throat, and met the stern gaze of a tall, bushy-whiskered, helmeted being, in a rough coat, with a belt round his waist, and a dark lantern at his side—a policeman.

My indignation was aroused.

“Let me go, will you!”

“Oh! yes.”

“I demand a reason for this treatment, sir. I demand your authority for this uncalled-for insult?”

“Come, this won’t do. It isn’t as if I didn’t know you. It isn’t as if a gentleman in Bloomsbury wasn’t inquiring for a check Hulster with a black velvet collar. You’ll come along with me.”

A light broke gradually in upon me. The beautiful organization of the police system, the rapidity with which that matchless force obtained its news, filled me by degrees with a mingled sense of delight and awe. "They manage these matters better in"—London.

"Oh! I understand now. It's all right, policeman; I've got the coat."

"Well—I see you have."

"I caught the thief half an hour ago; he slipped out of the coat, and left it in my hands. I meant to give him in charge, only—only—he wouldn't stop."

"Well, that's a pretty story to pitch to a sensible man," said the policeman, tightening his knuckles somewhat after this; "if I couldn't make a better tale on it than that, I'd shut up, and say nothing."

"But my name's Josiah Doddles."

"Jeremy Diddler, you mean. This way, if *you* please."

A dozen or more folk had collected round us by this time, and appeared to enjoy the cool irony of Policeman 012. But things were becoming serious. Policeman 012 evidently intended to place me in a very embarrassing position; there was no longer any doubt on my mind as to where I should spend the remainder of *my* night. The whole affair was positively absurd—to be taken up by a policeman for stealing one's own coat—I had never read of anything half so preposterous.

And yet, preposterous as it was, there was no beating sense into the official, who walked me along with a train of the unwashed at my heels. The more I argued the point, the more superciliously he regarded me, and the tighter he knuckled me for my impudence. He was an old bird, and chaff wasn't going down with him. He knew *me* well enough. He wouldn't have



evidently compared with some written statement in the police ledger.

"What's your name?" said the inspector, sternly eyeing me.

"Josiah Doddles."

"Come, none of that."

"I tell you my name *is* Doddles. I am the owner of that coat; I——"

"That'll do—that'll do. You can tell the magistrate all that nonsense in the morning. You persist in the name of Doddles?"

"I do."

"Will you take my advice, young man?"

"I don't know that I shall," I exclaimed, angrily; for I was becoming savage, and, consequently, very.

"Let me put another name," he said, "and you had better tell us what it is." "The name is 'Anteau.'"

"I won't be

talked to like this. I tell you that I am the proprietor of that portmanteau and this coat, sir. It's all a mistake—an infamous——”

“Just lock him up, Roberts; we've had quite enough of this.”

There was no help for it; the wretched Roberts led me away to durance vile, and the last words I heard were, “Run round to Mr. Fairback's and see if Mr. Doddles has gone.”

So there I was at the early hour of one in the morning, in a damp, ill-smelling police-cell, in company with a drunken man, the boy who had been carried away kicking, and a bricklayer's labourer, with a cut over his left eye, and an Irish *patois*. If my blue-eyed Lucy or my respectable parents could have seen me at that moment. I had been only six hours in London, and was now locked up by the police! The very thought was maddening. There was no one to

believe in my innocence; even the kicking boy—the only one who paid me any attention—slapped his hand on his cheek, and said, “Oh, yes!” sarcastically, when I related my misfortunes to him.

One hope brightened within me. To write to Papa Fairback, or to Lucy, who would recognize my handwriting, and fly to my rescue. I rushed to the door, and battered it with my hands and feet, till a trap flew open in it, and a policeman’s head peered through the grating.

“You mustn’t make that row here.”

“Pen and ink—I’ll write to Miss—no, not to Miss Fairback, she’s nervous—I’ll write to Mr. Fairback. Give me pen and ink!”

“Mr. Fairback will come round in the morning. Mr. Doddles has gone away, and no one knows his address. You’d better keep quiet, my fine fellow.”

“I insist upon the pen and ink.”

“Insist away ! but stand further back, or I shall shut your fingers in.”

Slap went the trap in my face. It was the door of Fate, which was mercilessly shut between me and the bright world of liberty I had quitted. I flung myself, all of a heap, in the corner, and gave myself up to despair ; thinking of Susan Hopley, the Maid and the Magpie, the Prisoner of Chillon, Baron Trenck, Sir Roger, and other victims. In that hideous cell I remained till ten o'clock the next morning, when preparations were made for my introduction to the presiding magistrate.

There is no necessity to prolong this story further ; the gentle reader can imagine by what means I obtained my release from the admirable police system before alluded to ; but he can *not* conceive the feelings of horror and ignominy which beset me during the awful night of my incarceration, unless he has already—but I will dismiss the subject.

Lucy Fairback is the blue-eyed, golden-haired, roguish, red-lipped wife of Josiah Doddles, junior, now ; and Josiah Doddles, junior, will not trouble London any more.

OTHELLO THE SECOND.

OTHELLO THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

MARY.

IS there such a thing as an undying love—
out of the books that prate so much about
it? I, Rebecca Bevis, have grave doubts,
coming, as I do, from a school of sceptics,
and being a discontented woman. In what
I was disappointed, and who disappointed
me, the reader will perceive before this
chapter closes; though it is of other lives
rather than my own that I attempt to write.

I am an old maid now—say a soured and discontented old maid, if you will, and that's enough. I was a soured and discontented woman years ago, though young and pretty then, it was said, for my troubles had come early in life, and people thought they were over, knowing nothing of the scars which were left. I hid my feelings fairly, and friends believed in me, and said amongst themselves, "How well she bears up; how bravely she has borne his want of faith in her, his disaffection." I think I did—for I was very proud, thank God!

He was not fit for me, and I should have made him unhappy as his wife; such thoughts as these were my consolation then; they are not now, perhaps, standing apart from the old life, and knowing how it has ended.

And this undying love of which I have spoken? Oddly enough I was not thinking of his old protestations, his fancy pictures of eternal summer. I was not even

dreaming of them five years afterwards, when I knew it was over for good, and that there was never a chance for me again. I was thinking then, as I think now, of the theory of eternal constancy, and what a mockery it all is.

Fred Bevis—my wild brother Fred, whom I have always loved so much, because he was weak and childish perhaps, or because he loved me very much too, and told his friends there was not a wiser, shrewder little woman in the world than I—it was this younger brother whose inconstancy was on my mind.

He was leaving England to make his fortune abroad, he said—to lose the little which his father had left him, I was sure—and on the eve of his departure, I was the witness to his solemn betrothal to Mary Vansittart, my dearest friend, my artless, loveable Mary, the very one I would have chosen for his wife from a legion of fair women.

They were to love each other all their

lives long—that is the theory which amuses young folk at first start. And both believed in these protestations for twelve months, at least. At the expiration of the first year, Fred came home more full of love than ever, but with less money in his purse. He had been unfortunate in his speculations—luck had been dead against him, he said—indeed, “Fred’s luck” had been a pleasant jest in our family before we were all scattered.

There were fresh protestations of fidelity between Fred and Mary, and then my brother sallied forth again to seek his fortune, and we heard no more of him for years. We thought he was dead—all but Mary, who believed in his life, but began at last to distrust his love, as well she might do.

He ended his long silence with a confession to me. Never a brave man, he had not the courage to tell Mary the truth ; I

was to stand between them as an intercessor, as a grim fate, perhaps, if these two had meant all that they had said. He had been unlucky again, he wrote, very unlucky this time, and there was no hope of retrieving his position. He released Mary from her engagement—he was bound in honour to do that—and I was to break the news to her at once. There was not a great deal concerning his lost hopes in his letter, on the contrary, rather a mournful dirge over his lost money, but I could not tell what feelings he was hiding from me. I fulfilled my duty, thinking, perhaps, I might help to lighten Mary's heart, or at least to shorten the years of Mary's life, for I was doing so in my own odd fashion.

He wrote of tears and sighs ; a downcast face ; a few days ; a readiness to agree ; probably it *was* for the best. Vansittart was very much of a girl whom I had ever

known. She was not disguising her feelings, I was sure. I knew the pre-occupied, far-away looks of a troubled woman too well. She was resigned to the position very quickly. She wrote her letter of farewell—the last of a long and loving series. She expressed her wishes gracefully for poor Fred's better luck, and there was the end of one more love-dream. What a stereotyped finale it always is, I thought.

The curtain of this drama rose quickly and unexpectedly upon the second act. A believer in the fickleness of human nature myself, I was yet surprised to learn of Mary Vansittart's engagement to Mr. Gordon, a gentleman of some position in the county, and who had been away from England for a year or two, disposing of his estates in the East Indies, where, it was rumoured, he had amassed considerable wealth. He came back to our quiet neighbourhood to settle down for good—to choose the best wife he

could find, and live "happy ever afterwards," if it were possible.

It was not possible—I could have told him *that*, had he done me the honour to consult me. When I heard from my dear Mary's own lips that he was engaged, it was too late. I was tongue-tied from that hour forth. It is possible that I betrayed my astonishment too clearly.

"You are offended with me, Beckie," she cried; "you think I should have waited a little longer—reflected, perhaps, a little more upon the old engagement."

"No, my dear, not that," I said, "I am only too glad you have got poor Fred completely out of your mind."

"We should not have agreed very well—Fred and I," she said, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps not," I answered; "and where did you meet Mr. Gordon? I have heard nothing of this."

I had been away in London on a visit,

and it seemed to have all happened without me in a strange way. As if I had had any right to be consulted in the matter !

"He is an old friend of papa's ; he came to see us on his return. I was a gawky girl whom he used to tease when he was here last. I should not have known him again. Oh ! he is so very handsome, despite his dark skin, Beckie. I like dark men, don't you?" she ran on, rhapsodically.

"He is very rich," I added, quietly.

"I don't care about riches," she replied. "I hope you will not think I have accepted him on that account, it is not in my thoughts ; it never has been."

"I believe you."

"He has been very frequently at our house during your stay in town. I have met him at one or two balls this winter ; we were formally engaged on Christmas Eve, only think !"

"And when shall you be married?"

"Not till next Christmas," she answered ;
"papa will have a year's engagement between us, and Conrad is very cross about it."

"A year is a fair probation," I said, calmly ; "it will give you time—it will give him."

"You speak as if you thought we were likely to change," she said, "and, oh ! that is not possible."

"He is much older than you—some ten years at least—and you are very young, Mary."

"Yes, yes ; but how do you know he is ten years older than I ? That is exactly the difference between us."

"Have I not lived in Westerton all my life, you silly child ? Did I not know Mr. Gordon years ago, when you were the 'gawky girl' of whom you have just spoken ?"

"Oh, yes ; and you knew Conrad before he went to India for the last time ?"

"Yes."

"How strange!" she said. "I mentioned your name to him, told him you were my dearest friend, and he never said he knew you."

"That is very likely—people forget so soon!"

"But," she added, confidentially, "I told him everything about Fred, and that I had been engaged to him for a little while, when—when——"

"When you were a child, and hardly knew your own mind," I added. "Well, I am very glad you have told him that."

"Of course. I was bound in honour to tell him."

"Certainly you were."

I did not tell her everything myself. I left it to Conrad Gordon to speak of an old engagement, too, if he cared to do so; if he thought he was bound in honour also. It was not my place to speak of a past love, of a bitter, needless, cruel quarrel, of all that

had been, and that could never, never be again.

I shed some tears over this, when Mary had left me. I was sorry for the engagement for Mary Vansittart's sake. To my nervous mind, it was an ill-assorted match, and would be broken off before the year was over, as mine and his was, as Mary and Fred's. Conrad Gordon had many admirable traits of character, he was in many ways a contrast to other men, being earnest, clever, honourable; but he was of an irritable and suspicious nature, a man persistently seeking for a second and hidden reason for everything upon earth, and one who had made his own life almost a curse by his miserable search. He had made mine completely so; he had suspected me cruelly and unjustly, and my pride could not brook his doubts. Hence we had parted, in the old times of which Mary Vansittart knew nothing.

I met him presently at Mary's father's

house—it was a meeting which we bore well, being both prepared for it, and both good actors. I had often wondered what sort of meeting it would be, and here it was, calm, smooth, and common-place—totally unmarred by false sentiment. How completely we had forgotten each other! What a farce, I thought again, is this talk of eternal constancy! He was gentle in his manner towards me, he was very loving and attentive to Mary Vansittart; he had improved greatly in his manners, a certain brusqueness which he had always evinced was entirely missing. Late in the evening he said to me apart—

“I have not told Mary of the past—it is not worth while, Miss Bevis.”

“Why not?” I replied, “it might be as well.”

“No, no, she is young and impulsive, very quickly disturbed, and it is your secret which I should respect, surely?”

"It is hardly a secret. I left it for you to tell; you have my free permission. What does it matter now?" I said, lightly.

"A great deal to me," he repeated, very gravely; "she would ask many questions, and I was wholly in the wrong."

"Yes, wholly," I repeated.

"It is late in the day to ask your pardon, Miss Bevis, but I do, with all my heart," he said, with strange humility.

"I thank you," I murmured back.

"All has happened for the best," he said. "We were not suited for each other. I was a jealous and vindictive fellow when I parted from you."

"Do not let us speak of it again," I said. "It is ended for good. We have got over our troubles very well," I added.

He laughed.

"Yes, we have indeed," he replied, "but it took me years to think I was in the wrong, you must know. Oh! how I have

hated you. I—but there, there, my character is changed, my whole being, I think, is renewed in my love for Mary Vansittart. It is a new life. I should die if that dream were to fade—if she were to have one thought of what a man I had been. And I *am* forgiven ?” he added, suddenly.

“To be sure you are,” was the reply ;
“only make Mary a good husband, for I love her very much.”

“Yes, yes, I understand. She has told me everything about you ; she loves you very much, too. How strange it all is !”

He went away to Mary’s side, and I sat watching them for awhile, thinking even that they might be happy after all ; that it was probable he had altered for the better, and I had known him only at his worst. Men do change, Heaven knows !

This is the prologue to my story, and will explain what follows. The engagement was continued throughout the year ; there were no lovers’ quarrels, no jealousies, no

suspicions—it was a year of mutual adoration. I contrasted it with my own fleeting engagement—one of storm and shipwreck—and thought I must have been gravely in fault myself, and full of ill-temper and distrust, or else the man before me had changed completely, since I had been “all in all” to him.

Conrad Gordon and Mary Vansittart were married two days before Christmas. It was a grand wedding, and I wished them with all my heart “God-speed,” and every blessing on their pilgrimage. The snow was falling thickly on them as they came out of church, and Gordon looked up at the sky, shuddered visibly, and frowned, as at a liberty taken with him by the elements.

His East Indian blood was chilled by the day’s inclemency.

“I should have liked sunshine on our wedding day,” he said to Mary.

“Does it matter?” she asked, with a smile.

"No, no—perhaps not," he answered,
"but I used to believe in omens once."

Yes, I remembered that time too well.

CHAPTER II.

“POOR FRED.”

THE happy couple spent a long honeymoon abroad. They were not back in Westerton before the spring ;—they began their home-life together with the same confidence with which they had entered into their engagement to be married—“how fond they are of each other,” was on the lips of every friend they had.

Yes, there seemed every prospect of theirs being a happy marriage—I was not inclined to doubt it myself now—only disposed to wonder occasionally why I had never known this new Conrad Gordon, whom everybody

liked ; why he had always been in the old days so different a man to me. All the faults of his nature he seemed to have left behind with his lands in East India, and to have returned an amiable, generous, high-souled gentleman ; he seemed to have outlived even his jealous disposition, any attention which his pretty wife received he took as a compliment, even as a pleasant jest. Was this really the same man ? was the wild thought which I would have at times.

All the spring passed thus—the bright summer when they went away to the sea—the autumn, up to the early winter, when they were back again in their grand home. From Conrad Gordon I received no further confidences ; I was assured he was happy, that he had not a care in the world from his affectionate wife, who made an idol of him after her own fashion too, and whose high spirits and girlish little fantasies were as predominant as in her maiden days. It could not last, I was certain—but when the

time would come for these two to be more staid and matter-of-fact and *homely*, I did not readily perceive.

Theirs was a gay life; if there were a fault to be found with them, it was in their incessant pursuit of pleasure, in the dinner-parties and balls which they gave at their own house—which they attended at their numerous friends'. There seemed no peace and rest, and little of the home life which, in her place, I would have preferred.

Whether she would have preferred it, too, I was not able to ascertain. She was fond of society, of admiration, of the busy world without doors—the gay life seemed to agree with her, and to steal no roses from her cheeks.

“Conrad is fond of seeing me the centre of a crowd,” she said to me once, “and I like the excitement of it all very well. We are not a steady-going, old married pair yet, Beckie.”

“No—but it is time you were,” I said.

It was close upon the end of the year—close upon Christmas time—when there came across the snow-covered lawn to my French window, at which I was sitting, a figure from the past, of which I had often dreamed. I did not see him until he was standing at the window to scare me—then his hearty laugh at my astonishment ran through the frosty air like a peal from the old days.

“Fred!” I cried, opening the window in my impulse, and letting him in, along with the snow-drift, “this is a surprise—how glad I am to see you back!”

“I thought you would be,” he answered, taking me in his arms. “I was sure you would, for one, at all events—sisters don’t change with every wind and tide, thank God!”

I looked into his face—something told me that he had already heard the news of Mary’s marriage, and was inclined to re-

gard it despondently,—almost as a breach of faith towards one who should not have been forgotten quite so readily, or been taken so quickly at his word. I did not speak of Mary ; I hastened to disencumber him of his great-coat and hat, to seat him in his old place by the fireside, with his bronzed, good-looking face full in the ruddy blaze before me.

“To think you are back again,” I said, exultingly, “and for good, is it?”

“I am not certain,” was his answer, “not half as certain as I was an hour ago, when it struck me how lonely you must be in the old home, and how I might help to cheer it for you.”

“And now?”

“And now I am not half sure of myself, and may want cheering instead,” he added ; “that’s my luck—‘Fred’s luck,’ as you used to say, if you remember.”

“Yes, I remember.”

We were silent for a while; he sat drawing patterns with the muddy toe of his boot on my crumb-cloth, to my maidenly discomfiture, but I had not the heart to scold him.

"I have come back rich, that is tolerably rich, for me," he said, suddenly, "and you do not congratulate me."

"I congratulate you, Fred, with all my heart."

"Thank you."

"And how——" I began, when he interrupted me.

"Oh! never mind that. I had grown desperate—it was sink or swim—a wild plunge to the other side, or a cool drop to the bottom, and I chanced it at the tables at Monaco. By Heaven, Fred's luck turned at last, and I made a heap of money in three hours, and came away before fortune deserted me in its scurvy old way. Have you ever known me exhibit as much prudence as that?"

"Not often," I answered, softly, "and I am sorry you have come back rich by these means, Fred."

"You must not preach," he said, quickly. "You were always disposed to be priggish and to sermonise. I often think that *that* 'last word' lost you Conrad Gordon, Beckie."

"Perhaps so," was my reply.

"And a good loss, too," he added, with a sudden fierceness, "I say a good loss—damn him! There!"

"Hush, hush, Fred—you forget yourself and me. You are not just."

"Has anyone been just to me—acted justly towards me, Rebecca," he continued, in the same fierce strain. "Have I not been a scapegoat all my life?"

He got up, and paced the room with long, impetuous strides; he struck the table with his hand as he passed it, and scattered my books upon the floor.

"What has disturbed you, Fred? Of

what have you to complain?" I asked.

"It is easy to inquire, but not easy to explain," he said, becoming somewhat calmer after this; "but I have not been treated well. She need not have taken me so completely at my word."

"You released her from the engagement—for it is of Mary you are speaking, I suppose?"

"Oh! yes, yes."

"Did you not mean——"

"I meant every word I said then," he interrupted angrily again, "but I was mad when I wrote, and she might have seen that, and waited a little while. Waited till I had come back—as I have done—to marry her, and, my God! to find her another man's wife."

"You have no right to complain, Fred," I urged.

"I think I have. That greedy old father of hers has been at the bottom of this plot, dragged her into it, persuaded her

what an eligible match it was. He always hated me," Fred muttered.

"Well, well, it is all over now; why should you rave like this?"

"It is not all over."

"It is—it must be."

"She has never loved that brute Gordon, or forgotten me," he exclaimed. "I will see her—I will explain—I will tell him—"

"Nothing, I hope, Fred," I concluded.

"Ah! wait a bit, Beck. You are no judge of character—you never were," he said. "I'm not the weak milksop you have fancied me."

"All this is folly."

"I have been wronged, and I'll have my revenge," he cried.

"There has been no wrong, and you will think better of it to-morrow."

"We shall see," he muttered.

His threats did not alarm me very much. I had seen a great deal of Fred's vapourings in my time, and I knew him too well, I

thought, to believe that any disappointment would weigh upon him long.

Was I a worse judge of man's character than are most of my sex? Was I as mistaken in my estimate of Fred's as I had been, to all appearances, in Conrad Gordon's?

It seemed so, for Fred Bevis was unlike the old brother of mine from that day forth. Despite his long silence, his surrender of all claim to Mary's affections, he was a man who had returned with a grievance, and was disposed to nurse it to his prejudice and my discomfiture. He was not my brother Fred again. He was a moody, discontented man, who cast a gloom over the house, rather than helped to brighten it as I had always thought he would. I missed the old hearty laugh which had been natural to him. I began to fear him and his moods a little—to be sorry, after awhile, that he had come back, although it was hardly in my heart to think very badly of

him. He was not the man for whose return I had prayed. He renewed his acquaintance with Conrad Gordon and Mary; living in so small a town it was impossible to prevent their meeting, indeed it was impossible to say why they should not meet. People who have changed their minds cross each other's path at every hour of the day, and these were common-place folk who might be trusted to play "propriety."

Conrad Gordon thought so, even turned the first meeting of the old lovers into a jest, as if anxious to put them at their ease. And Mary Gordon, proud of her husband's love and reciprocating it very warmly, was at her ease at once. She had no suspicion of the old passion burning in the breast of Fred Bevis; she had outlived her first romance, and she felt glad to meet him as a friend, to laugh even at the follies of the past, and the house of cards which had been built between them, and allowed to collapse, when they were almost boy and

girl. Fred affected to laugh also, but alone in his room at night I could hear him sobbing like a child, and raving like a madman. Yes, he was very weak, poor Fred, but his weakness had taken a different phase, and there was danger in it now—danger to others as well as to himself.

CHAPTER III.

THE BALL.

CONRAD GORDON issued announcements to all his friends that the anniversary of his wedding day was to be celebrated by a ball. It would be a grand ball, everybody was certain; when there was an opportunity for display, it was not in the Gordon nature to miss it. This had been always Conrad's weakness, and of late days, and with increasing wealth, it had grown upon him like a disease. He was spoiling his wife; he was offering a bad example to the county; he was encouraging extravagance, envious neighbours said among them-

selves, but they accepted his invitations to the *fête* with alacrity, and mustered in goodly numbers to the show.

I had had a faint hope that Fred would decline the invitation, but he professed himself anxious to be my escort, and Mary's urgent letter to me was one to which I could not say No. I should have been glad to hide away from all their gaiety, but it was the end of the first year of their happiness, and I *must* come, Mary wrote; and I did not like the idea of Fred's going to their house without me. He had become grave and thoughtful of late days, I have said; and I was doubtful of a manner that was far from natural.

We went to The Limes the day before Christmas Eve; it was the end of one year and the beginning of another in Mary Gordon's life. It became a memorable date to me. I was like some one behind the scenes who knew more than the rest, and had grown uneasy with the knowledge. I

was a spy in their midst—as earnest and as watchful as though an impending danger had been whispered to me, and it might be in my power to thwart it, with God’s help. It was a night of shadow, despite my effort to shake off the gloom which submerged me, despite the light and life on every side of me, the crowds of friends and acquaintances, the bright faces, the merry peals of laughter, the gay dance music from the orchestra. I had not seen Mary in higher spirits; her whole soul was in the success of the entertainment, and her husband flitted to and fro, an amiable master of the ceremonies, intensely anxious for the comfort of his guests.

This was in the early part of the evening; after the great supper there was a change. I had been waiting for it; I felt there was a crisis in more than one weak life that night. Mary was walking with my brother, and I was watching them, when Gordon’s voice, close to my ear, startled me.

"I am afraid you have spent a very dull evening, Rebecca," he said. He had taken to call me by my Christian name again, following his wife's example.

"Oh, no; I have danced several times. The party has been a very great success; don't you think so?" I said, hurriedly, perhaps a little incoherently.

"I hope it has," he answered. "Mary and I have not spared any pains to do honour to the anniversary of our wedding day, and she is very happy." I did not answer him; there was a new tone in his voice which I fancied I remembered—a faint ring of an old inharmonious note that used to jar upon me.

"I do not remember seeing Mary in such high spirits as these before," he added, thoughtfully; "she is as impulsive and full of excitement as a child."

"This is a memorable day to her."

"To us both," he added.

"Certainly."

"We look back and have nothing to regret," he continued; "we look forward full of faith too—that is what Mary said this morning."

"Yes, she is a very happy wife."

"Do you think so?"

"I do, indeed."

"I have tried to make her so, God knows," he said. Then he added, abruptly, "How old is your brother, may I ask?"

"Three and twenty."

"Seven years younger than I; he has the world before him."

"I trust he will succeed in it."

"Don't you think he will?" he asked, very sharply now.

"Ye-es I hope so—but he has been unfortunate."

"Will he remain a great while with you, do you think?"

"I do not know."

He did not look at me whilst he put those questions, and he did not appear to

be interested in my answers. I glanced up at him at last ; he was watching his wife and Fred with a fixed intentness that was remarkable, and his swarthy features had deepened very much in hue. I had seen him look like that in the old days ; I had missed it till now.

“How long were those two engaged to each other before they discovered their mistake, I wonder ?”

He was hardly speaking to me, but I replied to him.

“Two years, almost—he was abroad the greater part of the time.”

“Yes, yes—I know,” he added, quickly ; “Mary has told me everything—she has concealed nothing from me. It was the old story of a boy and girl’s fancy for each other, ripening into the usual childish attachment—these first loves do not last, and are invariably mistakes.”

He had already forgotten I had been his first love—that he had been mine ! He

was in a half dream with one couple amongst the dancers for the dream figures which possessed him.

"I shall be glad when the *fête* is over," he muttered; "I am tired to-night—I am getting old, I fancy."

He strolled moodily away, and when the dance was concluded I saw him approach his wife, whisper a few words in her ear, draw her arm through his own, and walk away with her towards the spacious conservatory, into which the ball-room opened. My brother came and sat by my side, and burst into a loud laugh.

"By Jove, if I don't think old Gordon's jealous!" he cried.

"He has had no cause, I am sure."

"Well, no. But why is Beckie Bevis so cock-sure?" he said, flippantly.

"Because Mary is not a flirt, and you are an honourable man," I replied.

"Not a flirt! Oh, you know a great deal! Why, half the fellows are raving about

Gordon's wife to-night," he said ; " and did you ever see her look so beautiful ?"

" Probably not. A ball-dress becomes a pretty girl."

" She hardly looks more than a girl, poor thing, does she?" said Fred ; " and yet she has been married a year to that beetle-browed blackamoor."

" Hush ! somebody will hear you."

" I don't care who hears me," he said, loudly ; " it is a fact. Do you think she would have had him if it had not been for his money ? Or that you would have had him either, mind you—all those long years ago, when he asked you, and then served you so badly."

" I have never owned that he treated me badly," I cried, indignantly, " and you have no right to tell me so."

" I beg your pardon, Beckie," he answered, very quickly at my protest. " I ought not to have said that. There, there, God help me, I don't know what I am saying."

"Shall we go home?"

"Presently, in a few minutes. Mrs. Gordon has promised me another dance," he stammered.

I looked up at him, and his colour changed.

"Yes, I know what is in your suspicious little mind," he said, with a forced laugh, "you are thinking of my melo-dramatic raving on the day I came back to Westerton. All that is over and gone."

"I am glad. It *is* all over, then."

"Yes, all over," he repeated.

There was a partner for me in the next quadrille, and Conrad Gordon and his wife were our *vis à vis*. I glanced towards Mary with a smile, which she did not reciprocate, there was a strange, grave look that was foreign to her face, it was as though I had offended her in some way. Conrad Gordon had not lost his own grave aspect either; although he gazed anxiously at his wife, as if to catch her glance. There

had been a few words "a little difference," and my brother Fred had been the cause—were the first faint mutterings of the storm to be heard on the anniversary of their wedding day?

It was a melancholy quadrille for three of the party, and my partner who made the fourth in the set regarded us with dismay. When it was concluded I followed Mary, and her husband seeing me approach left us together.

"Has anything happened? Are you fatigued?" I hastened to inquire, as I sat down by her side.

"What should have happened to me?" was the sharp rejoinder.

"I—I don't know; I thought, that——" and then I came to a full stop. It was all very difficult of explanation.

"Nothing has happened very particularly," she answered, slowly. "I have met with a surprise. That is all."

"Has Fred——" and then I stopped again.

"Yes—Fred; he has told me everything."

"Everything," I repeated, wonderingly.
"I do not understand."

"Everything concerning your past engagement to Conrad, which you have kept from me, hidden from me, both of you, all of you," she cried, fluttering her fan violently, and the tears starting to her eyes.

"Oh! my dear Mary, I would have told you this long ago, but it was your husband's wish that I should not."

"You study my husband's wishes, it appears."

"It was his place to tell you. I asked him if he would do so, before your wedding day; I knew it would be the better course. Ah! do not reprove me, dear, I will tell you all to-morrow."

She softened at the regretful tones of my voice, at the sorrow which my face betrayed. She dropped her fan, and placed her hands in mine at once.

"There, there, Beckie, think no more of this," she exclaimed. "I am foolish—I—I understand why you did not tell me; it was from sheer kindness; but Conrad has put me out to-night. He has taken me to task, lectured me, found fault with me, only think, for the first time in my life, and about nothing. He shall be sorry for it!"

"Forget all, and forgive all, both of you," I urged.

"I will not forgive him for a week," she answered, pettishly, "and to scold me for talking to Fred, poor, simple-minded, honest old Fred. It is too ridiculous. As if I had not known Fred all my life, as if we were not to be trusted even now! as if——"

"Mary, I think it is our dance," said Fred's voice so close to us that we both started; then he led her away, and the instant afterwards they were whirling round in the waltz together. Conrad Gordon took her place at once, he had been watching

us, probably. The guests were thinning and the hour was growing late.

"What has she been saying to you?" he asked, hastily, "may I inquire?"

"She will tell you," I answered, hurriedly, "it is nothing of importance."

"Everything is of importance that concerns her," he said. "We have had a few words—after all, the devil is not dead in me."

He stamped his foot upon the floor, and I could see a red light in his eyes.

"She has been speaking of our past engagement——"

"Ha! who has told her of that?" he exclaimed. "Your brother—has he come back to wreck me? That man, of all men!"

"No, no, do not think so," I urged. "It escaped in conversation between them. That's all."

"I will try to think it is all," he replied; "if I am mistaken, I am sorry for—your brother."

1. NAME
 2. ADDRESS
 3. CITY
 4. STATE
 5. ZIP
 6. PHONE
 7. TELETYPE
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CHAPTER IV.

THE MONSTER JEALOUSY.

ALL the happiness that Conrad Gordon and his wife had experienced was to be comprised in the first fleeting year of their marriage; after that there came, with a terrible quickness, doubts, jealousies, accusations—the long and ghastly army of the disaffected, marching onwards to misery, with muffled drums, and colours trailing in the dust. These two were not the first couple who had started bravely in life and then created their own troubles; many might have read the wedded folk make

their own moral, not pause to read it, or the world belies them very much.

It would have been a common-place story to me, had I not been deeply interested in it; had it not been my brother's fault to some extent, despite his indignant assertion to the contrary. If he would go away, I said to him—if he would once more leave Westerton, if only for a little while! Then followed his arguments, difficult to combat, although guessing at their fallacy. What had he done that he should be banished from his native place? Had he known so much of home-happiness that he should wilfully desert it, and give up the new friends by whom he was surrounded, because it pleased Conrad Gordon to be jealous of him? Conrad would be jealous of somebody else, if he went away to-morrow, and he, Fred Bevis, would not sacrifice his life for another man's whim, and an old maid's exaggerated fears. I was not thirty years of age, but it had come to taunting me

with my maiden estate—with my old resolve not to be sought in marriage again. Fred had loved me once—now he satirised me, and thought I was taking Gordon's part against his own. As if I had any part to take in this sad business.

Certainly my sympathies were for Mary. She was young, weak, and unwise, but I could picture myself in her place, suffering like her, although fighting my battle differently, and after my stronger nature. I had missed this calamity by my own high spirit, and I was grateful for it now. All *had* happened for the best.

There is no intention in this record to give the whole history of these married folk—how it ended is before me, and more to the purport of my story. That Gordon and his wife became by degrees an unhappy couple, despite all their respect and love for each other, it is sufficient to state here—there is not a great deal to marvel at in the position. Not all Conrad's affection for his

wife could keep down his suspicions now that the evil seed had been sown, and the crop was peeping above ground. He was a man, I knew too well, who was inclined to make the most of his doubts, to torture himself with a hundred suppositions when the plain, honest truth would have sufficed, but I had given him credit for growing wiser with his years, and for having learned something even from his experience of past mistakes.

And Gordon's wife with whom I reasoned at every opportunity and failed to convince? Here was my own high spirit working very differently, and to no purpose—resisting, insisting, and holding its ground, rebelling against dictation, and strong with its own sense of right, following its own course, in vain. She was his wife, and therein lay the mighty difference between herself and me. It was her duty to obey now, not to resist, but that she had forgotten, and my “preaching”—Heaven forgive me, if I preached too

much—only hardened her heart against me. She was not always in the right, poor Mary—she taunted me more than once, with my past engagement to her husband. I was always his friend, not hers. I loved him still—I worked against her; she would never see me again! I had one answer in my arguments with her—it would be better for Fred to go away. It was in her power to persuade him, perhaps. A few words from her might have effect in the quarter where I had failed so utterly, if she would only attempt them, for all sakes?

What could she do? she answered. Why should she lower herself by professing to believe that my brother still loved her. Would not people talk of her as the woman who had been wholly in the wrong, and from whose clutches it had been necessary to save Fred Bevis? How was it possible to prove the calumny false—to live down the whole scandal with which the town was full—if Fred went away in haste? Would

not everybody say—would not Conrad Gordon say—"There was something in it; there was more than something in it—it was all true?"

"Ask him to go," I said again to all this reasoning; "he will go for your sake."

"I will not lower myself to ask him."

"May I tell him you will be glad when he goes?"

"No. I shall not be glad," was the warm reply. "He is the only friend who defends me; who takes my part and silences accusers—he is the one true friend left," she cried.

"Mary, has it come to loving him?"

"No," she cried, starting up from the chair in which she had been sitting, "I love no one but Conrad, and his cruelty is killing me. Oh! he will not believe a single word I say."

"Ask Fred Bevis to go away," I said again.

"You talk like a parrot," she exclaimed, "and I will not listen to you any longer."

She would dash away to her home after one of these altercations, and several days would pass before we met again, and spoke and wrangled again after the same fashion.

Twelve months afterwards—a long twelve months—Conrad Gordon adopted his own plans without much thought of Mary; he had his own solution to the riddle, and it was not an unwise expedient. One morning late in December—the 23rd—his own wedding-day—when all happiness had completely vanished, he surprised me by a visit. Of late days we had not met, and he apologised for the intrusion as a stranger might have done. My brother came in whilst he was there, and would have withdrawn, but Mr. Gordon went towards him and shook hands, to my surprise and Fred's.

"I have called to take leave of you, as

well as your sister," he said. "Pray do not run away from me."

Fred had a bad habit of showing his dislikes, and his antipathy to Mary's husband was not to be disguised. He shook hands coldly, however, and looked at the speaker as at a man of whom it was necessary to be wary.

"I am going away for a long time," Conrad said, turning to me as he spoke, "and I could not leave an old friend without a word of adieu."

"Going away," I said, slowly, "and with Mary, of course?"

"Of course with Mary," he repeated; "she and I have been talking over this expedition for a long while, and at last she has summoned the courage to accompany me."

"I am glad. Where are you going?"

"To the East, principally," he said.

"You will be a long time absent from Westerton."

"Two years, probably," he answered.

"It will be a great change for Mrs. Gordon," said my brother at this juncture. "She has hardly been out of this dull little town all her life."

"Yes, a great change," remarked Conrad. "She looks forward to it with considerable pleasure, I am glad to say. You will call, Mr. Bevis, with your sister, and bid her good-bye," he added, to my intense astonishment.

"Thank you," answered Fred, as surprised as myself, "Becky and I will come—I think."

"We shall leave on Saturday. It is possible I am saying farewell to both of you now, as I start for London this afternoon, and shall not return till late on Friday evening. If that is so," he said, suddenly extending both hands towards me, "good-bye—and Heaven reward you," he added, in a lower tone.

I did not understand him, and I felt that

I could not ask before my brother for an explanation. I followed him into the hall, and said, with affected lightness,

"For what is Heaven to reward me, Mr. Gordon?"

"You can guess," he said, hurriedly; "it is all your good example, your kind advice to Mary, which has had its effect at last."

"You two are at peace, then?"

"Yes, there has been one more quarrel," he said, despondently. "I acted like a madman; it was after Edward's party, last week, where we met your brother. But it is all over, and we are friends, lovers, again. We shall quarrel no more; we have come to a full, honest explanation of everything. It was your advice to Mary—always—and we are going abroad now on our second honeymoon. Congratulate me—and ask your brother to forgive my jealous nonsense. I have wholly changed."

"I hope so. Mary is young, and you are not always just."

"I have been terribly unjust, I know," he murmured, as he left me.

I returned to my room to tell Fred all that had been said, and to deliver Conrad's parting message to him. I had faith in its effect, for Fred was not a man to lose all trust in, weak as he might be. He sat and heard me with his white hands tightly locked together, and a deep furrow in his forehead. I could see his lips quivering as I watched him.

"Did he really ask me to forgive him?" he said, wonderingly.

"Yes."

"I suppose I have driven them both away," he added, sadly, "and it would have been much easier for me to go, as you suggested long since. But I—could not!"

"Perhaps all is for the best," I said.

"It is for the worst with me," he answered. "It always is."

"Nonsense. This should be no affliction

to you," I said. "When shall we bid Mary Gordon 'good-bye'?"

"I shall not go," he replied, very firmly.

"Not go!"

"I have seen her for the last time," he said, "if I am so dangerous a person," he added, shrugging his shoulders; "it may be as well not to aggravate matters by calling at The Limes. He will be glad to hear I have not been, when he comes home on Friday night."

"That's bravely said of you, Fred," I exclaimed. "I think it is wise—I am sure it is—although he does not believe in your love for Mary now."

"If he had told me that, I should have said he was mistaken," said Fred, "for I do love her. I always have loved her—she kills me by going away, I swear. Oh! Mary, God help me after this!"

"Fred, Fred!"

He did not hear my last words of entreaty

to him to be calm—he gave way utterly—he buried his face within his hands, and sobbed passionately, and I stole from the room and left him to his childish grief.

CHAPTER V.

THE PARTING.

FRED BEVIS kept his word, and did not accompany me in my farewell visit to Mary Gordon. For once in a way, he said, he had made up his mind, and there was no power on earth to alter it. Conrad's forgiveness, his sudden exhibition of confidence had disarmed my brother, and Fred had awakened to the conviction that he had not played a worthy part. He confessed as much as this to me, and he desired his best wishes for Mary's happiness to be humbly conveyed to her.

Sitting at the window of her drawing-room, in the twilight, with the snow-flakes flickering past, I gave Mary my brother's message, and she smiled faintly at it, and said —

“Do you know what to-day is?”

“Your wedding-day. Two years to-day !”

“Conrad will be back to-night—it seems strange that he should be away—but he has a great deal of business to transact in town before we leave to-morrow.”

“And you are not sorry to leave?”

“I am very glad, Beckie,” she confessed, “it is the beginning of a new life—it is what we both should have done long ago—had we had the courage to speak out. What a long, dreadful, weary year it has been !”

“Happily over now, the worst and darkest year of all your life.”

“I trust so,” she said, with a sigh ; then

she caught me suddenly by the wrist and said, "But do you think I *can* trust him?"

"You mean——"

"Conrad, not the other," she answered, "will it not all come back in time? Will he not have those dreadful thoughts of me again? Shall I escape them by going abroad with him?"

"Yes, yes, I think so," I hastened to assure her.

"I would go to the world's end to have his love and faith back. There shall be no pride to keep us at arm's length, at heart's length, any more. We will both speak out all that rankles in our minds. You believe that is best?"

"Assuredly."

"Still," she added, sorrowfully, "I may not be able to convince him, he is not always willing to be convinced."

"That is like a husband," I said, laugh-

ingly, "but you must be a loving wife always resolved to succeed."

She did not laugh back at me, it was a pale, mournful face which perplexed me.

"I wonder what kind of a husband he would have been to you if you and he had made up your quarrel before I came from boarding-school," she said.

I laughed again, though her words made me wince a little. I was too old and prim for him, I said. And I should have been very obstinate and aggravating.

"And then," she added, more thoughtfully still, "I should have married your brother Fred, and have made him unhappy instead of Conrad. Not that Fred is happy now, poor fellow."

"Don't think so," I said. "He is happy enough. He quickly forgets everything, and no impression is lasting with him."

"I am not quite sure of that; and oh!

Beckie," she cried, "I know now how much he loves me."

"You do!"

"I have been so sorry, so terribly grieved," she whispered, hiding her head upon my bosom, "for it seems sometimes as if I had encouraged him. And I never wanted his affection—I have not had one spark of love for him since my marriage—but he thinks I have—and to vex my jealous husband I have laughed and talked with him too much. And it has come to his loving me, and this is my life-long punishment."

She looked hard into my face, and rested her hands upon my shoulders.

"When Conrad and I have left Westerton, tell Fred kindly this for me, and in my defence, please," she said, "lest he should think always—as he thinks now—that I was as weak as himself, and had learned to love him. Will you promise that?"

"Yes—I promise."

"And—oh! there is one thing more," she said, with her large dark eyes still fixed upon me steadily, "if it should ever come to pass that I am away from Conrad—a long, long distance away—and he is living with his heart closed against me as it has been all this bitter year, will you tell him what I have said, and what message I bade you give poor Fred—for my honour's sake and his? Pray do this?"

"With Conrad Gordon, Heaven forbid that this should be my task," I replied.

"Ah! yes—Heaven forbid it, but its ways are inscrutable, and this is only the eve of my second marriage year, remember."

"And the beginning of the third, and best, and truest, Mary," I said. "Why, I can wish you a merry Christmas this time, and be sure it will come."

"Yes—this one—but afterwards."

"No; no afterwards. Good-bye—God bless you."

"Good-bye—and God bless *you*, dear."

She stood at the door to see the last of me—I see her face now, fair, and young, and bright—but with the sadness on it always.

"You will not forget," she said—and in all my life to follow I never did. Neither her words—nor that pale, beautiful face—nor the wistful look in the large brown eyes.

"*You will not forget!*" rang for ever like a warning in my ears—like the chiming of a bell—the ringing of a death-note.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1995. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a major factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has also become a major employer of women. In 1980, women made up 40% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 50%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing participation of women in the workforce, and the increasing demand for public services.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people with disabilities. In 1980, people with disabilities made up 10% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 20%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing participation of people with disabilities in the workforce, and the increasing demand for public services.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people from ethnic minorities. In 1980, people from ethnic minorities made up 5% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 15%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing participation of people from ethnic minorities in the workforce, and the increasing demand for public services.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people from the lower social classes. In 1980, people from the lower social classes made up 30% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 40%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing participation of people from the lower social classes in the workforce, and the increasing demand for public services.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people from the lower income groups. In 1980, people from the lower income groups made up 20% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 30%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing participation of people from the lower income groups in the workforce, and the increasing demand for public services.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people from the lower education levels. In 1980, people from the lower education levels made up 15% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 25%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing participation of people from the lower education levels in the workforce, and the increasing demand for public services.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people from the lower health status. In 1980, people from the lower health status made up 10% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this had increased to 20%. This increase has been driven by a number of factors, including the growth of the public sector, the increasing participation of people from the lower health status in the workforce, and the increasing demand for public services.

